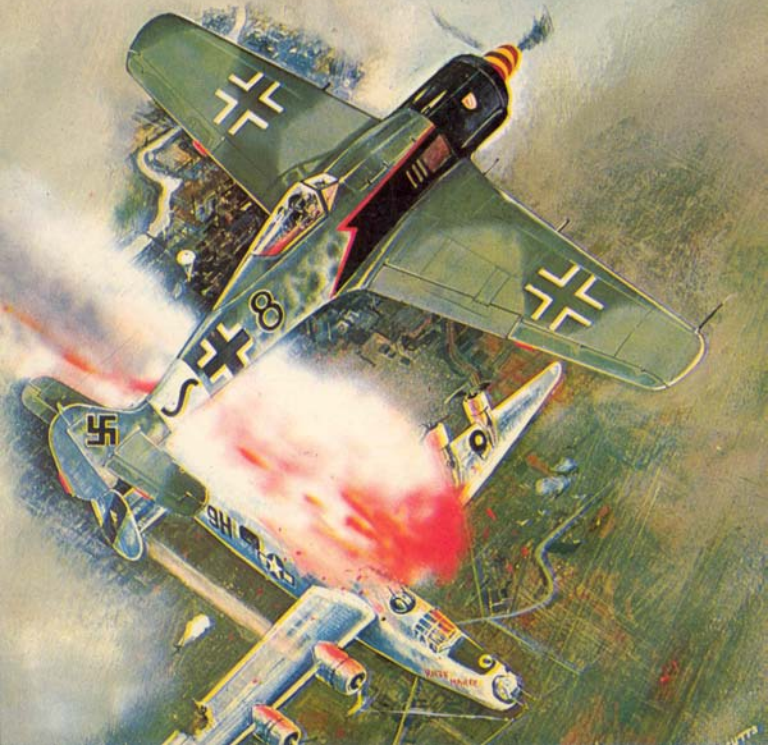
OSPREY/**AIRWAR 24**

LUFTWAFFE FIGHTER UNITS
EUROPE 1942-45

BY CHRISTOPHER SHORES



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EDITOR: JERRY SCUTTS

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Fighter pilots of *Luftflotte* 3 relax between sorties, their Messerschmitt Bf109Fs ready for immediate action.

Modest Force

By the early summer of 1941 a large part of the Luftwaffe fighter force had moved eastwards for the attack on the Balkans and Russia; of those units which had participated in the fighting over England during 1940, only two *Jagdgeschwader* remained in the west—JG 2 in western France, and JG 26 in north-west France and Belgium. These units had almost completed re-equipment with the latest Messerschmitt Bf109F fighters, although a few of the earlier Bf109Es were still on hand; several leading pilots did not like the F model, and continued to fly their faithful 'Emils' throughout the summer.

These units were not alone in their defence of the west, for JG 1 had been resurrected early in the year, I *Gruppe* being formed at De Kooy in Holland for the defence of North Sea shipping from attacks by RAF Coastal and Bomber Commands. It joined I/JG 52 on these duties until September 1941, when the latter unit withdrew preparatory to rejoining the rest of its *Geschwader* on the Eastern Front. That same month I and II/JG 53 arrived in Holland from Russia, remaining for some two months before flying off again, this time to Sicily. An autonomous *Jagdgruppe Stavanger*, formed from a nucleus provided by I/JG 77, was based in Norway, on airfields in the Oslo and Trondheim areas. These units were mainly involved in the interception of the occasional anti-shipping strike and reconnaissance from the UK.

It was JG 2 and 26 which were to bear the brunt of the air fighting as the RAF opened its cross-Channel offensive. Initially their opponents were Spitfires and Hurricanes, sometimes several wings strong and frequently accompanied by a small formation of Blenheims—'bait' to bring the Luftwaffe fighters up to give battle. The arrival of the battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* in Brest harbour during March brought an increasing weight of attack to this area, including a number of day raids by small formations of Stirlings, Halifaxes and Manchesters. It was against these attacks that the fighters of *Luftflotte* 3 were to achieve the Luftwaffe's first successes over four-engined bombers, the climax being Operation 'Sunrise' on 24 June 1941, when Halifaxes first appeared by day. Five were shot down by JG 2, which also accounted for a number of accompanying Wellingtons and Hampdens. Over Brest and farther north above the Norwegian fjords, the occasional appearance—at very high altitude—of the first few Flying Fortress Is of No. 90 Sqn., RAF, provided some early experience of the problems of intercepting such types. Two finally fell to JG 77 aircraft of the *Jagdgruppe Stavanger* on 8 September.

Over the Channel coast the *Jagdflieger* were operating in favourable conditions: usually, with adequate warning of a raid, they were able to reach altitude in good time, and dictate the terms of combat. Flying over occupied Europe, a bale-out or crash-landing rarely resulted in the loss of pilots, the proximity of their bases allowing them to remain in combat for much longer than their opponents. Their tactics also differed markedly from those of the RAF the previous year. Except when a particularly important target was under attack, they did not attempt to intercept the bombers but waited above for stragglers and then hit them hard—tactics that frequently resulted in severe RAF losses.

The RAF had also rested many of the experienced pilots of 1940, while at the same time considerably expanding the number of operational fighter squadrons. The result was a noticeable drop in the experience of the average pilot opposing the *Jagdflieger*, which nevertheless suffered losses. The *Kommodore* of JG 2, *Major* Wilhelm Balthasar, was shot down and killed by Spitfires on 3 July 1941, while on the 10th of that month, *Maj.* Rolf Pingel, *Kommandeur* of I/JG 26, was brought down, reportedly by anti-aircraft fire, while on a sortie over southern England, crash-landing his Bf109F and becoming a prisoner. Balthasar had just been awarded the *Eichenlaub* (EL) to his *Ritterkreuz* (RK), and was credited with forty-seven victories, seven of them in Spain; Pingel was also a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, with four of his twenty-six victories there, and was also a *Ritterkreuzträger*. Balthasar's place was taken by *Maj.* Walter Oesau, reputed to have been one of the toughest pilots in the Luftwaffe. He returned to the west from Russia just as the award of the *Schwerte* (S) to his RK *mit* EL was announced following his 80th victory and by late October 1941 had become the third pilot to achieve 100. He was notable amongst those who continued to prefer the Bf109E.

July 1941 had seen II/JG 26 receiving the first examples of a test batch of Focke-Wulf Fw190A-1s, and by September the unit's Bf109E-7s had been completely replaced. The Fw190's combat debut in August had not

One of the leading *Experten* on the Western Front, *Hptm.* Josef 'Pips' Priller (r) confers with pilots of his *Gruppe*—III/JG 26—during 1942, with a Messerschmitt Bf109F in the background.

An early production Focke-Wulf Fw190A-1, Wr. Nr. 269, of II/JG 26, is pushed out from dispersal. Note the Bf109F in the background (l).

been auspicious, three machines being lost in the first ten days. Then, on 18 September, the *Kommandeur, Hauptmann* Walter Adolph (RK; twenty-nine victories), was shot down and killed. He was replaced by *Hptm.* Joachim Müncheberg, recently returned from North Africa and, at that time, one of the leading *Experten* of the *Geschwader*. Further supplies of the Fw190A-1 started to reach III/JG 26 during October, and some success with the basically excellent fighter was achieved. Losses continued to be suffered, however, three more going down on 8 November. Two days earlier, III *Gruppe* had lost one of its leading pilots, *Hptm.* Johann Schmid (RK; 41 victories). During August 1941 he had claimed three victories in a day on no less than five occasions!

By the end of November 1941 the first examples of the improved Fw190A-2 had appeared, and the *Würger* (Butcher Bird) had become a fact of JG 26's life. The *Geschwader* lost its *Kommodore* at this time, though in happy circumstances. After a record ninety-four victories in the west, *Oberstleutnant* Adolf Galland was promoted to *Inspekteur der Jagdflieger*, following the death of Werner Mölders. His place at the head of JG 26 was taken by *Maj.* Gerd Schöpfel. The year had also seen the departure of I/JG 52 from Holland, a loss made good by the expansion of JG 1. A new III *Gruppe* was formed, and during September I/JG 3 had been recalled from the Russian Front, under its *Kommandeur, Hptm.* Hans von Hahn, to become II/JG 1. The *Gruppe* had achieved substantial success in the east, claiming 293 victories; two of its pilots had scores over thirty, and five more above twenty.

Finally during November 1941 a new fighter-bomber *Staffel*, 10 (*Jabo*)/JG 2, was formed to meet the shortage of offensive airpower in the west, followed shortly afterwards by a similar unit, 10 (*Jabo*)/JG 26. These two specialized Bf109F-equipped *Staffeln* undertook low-level attacks on targets along the English south coast, and on shipping.

One of Adolf Galland's first tasks in his new capacity was to become one of his greatest triumphs—the provision

Luftwaffe fighter unit disposition in the west, early 1942:

	WESTERN FRANCE	
Stab/JG 2	*Maj.* Walter Oesau	Bf109F
I/JG 2	*Oblt.* Erich Leie	Bf109F
II/JG 2	*Hptm.* Heino Greisert	Bf109F
III/JG 2	*Hptm.* Hans Hahn	Bf109F
10 (*Jabo*)/JG 26		Bf109F
	NORTH WESTERN FRANCE AND BELGIUM	
Stab/JG 26	*Maj.* Gerd Schöpfel	Fw190A
I/JG 26	*Hptm.* Johannes Seifert	Bf109F
II/JG 26	*Hptm.* Joachim Müncheberg	Fw190A
III/JG 26	*Hptm.* Josef Priller	Fw190A
10 (*Jabo*)/JG 26		Bf109F
	NORTHERN GERMANY AND HOLLAND	
Stab/JG 1	*Maj. Dr.* Erich Mix	Bf109F
I/JG 1		Bf109F
II/JG 1	*Hptm.* Hans von Hahn	Bf109F
III/JG 1		Bf109F
	NORWAY	
I/JG 5	*Maj.* Joachim Seegert	Bf109F
(forming from *JGr. Stavanger* during January 1942)		

Focke-Wulf Fw190A-1s of II/JG 26 undergoing servicing on a French airfield.

of fighter cover for the 'Channel dash' of the warships trapped in Brest. Every available fighter was marshalled for Operation 'Cerberus', including 252 Fw190s and Bf109s of JG 1, 2, and 26, and the *Jagdschule Paris*. Night-fighter Bf110s were to provide dawn and dusk cover. Before dawn on 12 February 1942 *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* crept out of port and headed north. Undetected until they were approaching Dover, the ships were covered by JG 2's patrols, which had been undisturbed. Bad weather (which had aided the concealment of the ships) did result in the loss of seven Bf109Fs, however, although no pilots were killed. Just as the handover to JG 26 began, British aircraft appeared in force—in the shape of Swordfish of 825 Sqn., Fleet Air Arm. The pilots of II/JG 2 and 9/JG 26 intercepted, the latter having to drop the flaps and undercarriages of their Fw109s to stay behind their lumbering quarries. All the biplanes were shot down.

Throughout the day RAF bombers searched for the elusive ships, but were unable to inflict any damage. JG 26 continued to provide cover until the flotilla reached the Scheldt estuary, where II/JG 1 took over. The day cost the *Schlageter Jagdgeschwader* only three Fw190s and one Bf109F, but British casualties were twenty-six bombers and torpedo-bombers and sixteen fighters.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1942 the RAF appeared over the Continent in growing strength, but still the Luftwaffe fighters retained the upper hand. Slowly but steadily the force available began to grow, despite the calls of other fronts. Early in the year a fourth *Gruppe* was added to JG 1, which sent a detachment to Norway to provide the nucleus of III/JG 5, which had begun forming at Brest from training *Staffeln*. The unit was to remain in the Trondheim area for only a short time before being posted to the far north to operate against the Russians. Before the summer was out, however, IV/JG 5 had begun forming to protect the Trondheim–Narvik area.

By June 1942 the whole of JG 26, including 10 (*Jabo*)Staffel, had received Fw190s, the A-2 model predominating. II and III/JG 2 had also re-equipped, while the Focke-Wulf was also reaching II and IV/JG 1 in Holland, and the new IV/JG 5 in Norway. With Brest no longer a magnet for bombers, the fighting tended to concentrate farther north, and during the early summer, I/JG 2, under *Oblt.* Rudolf Pflanz, was detached to reinforce JG 26. At the same time II and IV/JG 1 moved to bases in Holland at Katwijk and Bergen-op-Zoom, from where they became involved in a number of brushes with RAF fighters. Here their relative lack of experience showed, for the results of these early engagements were by no means always in their favour.

An event of importance to both sides occurred during the evening of 23 June 1942, when a formation of new Fw190A-3s, drawn from the *Stab* and 7 *Staffel* of JG 2, flew a sweep over south-western England. After a brush with Spitfires, the *Geschwaderadjutant, Oblt.* Arnim Faber, became disorientated, crossed the Bristol Channel under the impression that it was the sea between England and France, and landed at Pembrey in South Wales. Faber was captured, having presented the British with an undamaged example of the Luftwaffe's latest fighter.

The Fw190 was soon to be ousted from its vaunted position, however, for at the start of July, I/JG 2 received the first Bf109Gs issued to a unit in the west. At the same time the rest of I/JG 2 received Fw190s, and 1 *Staffel* was renumbered 11 *Staffel*, to fly high-altitude operations with its new aircraft. Shortly afterwards a similarly equipped 11/JG 26 was formed.

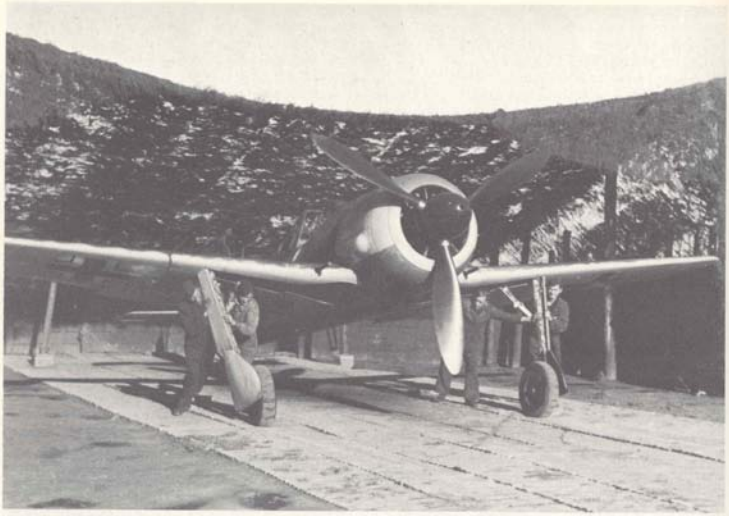
The *Jabostaffeln* continued their hit-and-run attacks on shipping and coastal areas throughout the year, but on 17 July, 10/JG 2 lost its illustrious commander, *Hptm.* Frank Liesendahl, during a shipping attack off Brixham. At the time of his death he was probably the most notable *Jaboflieger* in the Luftwaffe, and had been decorated with the RK. July also saw the demise of 11/JG 2's leader, *Oblt.*

'Rudi' Pflanz, who was shot down and killed over Abbeville by Spitfires on the last day of the month. One of the leading pilots in the west at this time—his score stood at fifty-two— he too was a *Ritterkreuzträger*.

Generally, however, losses had been relatively light. In the three months to mid-August, JG 2 and 26 had together lost only thirty-three pilots killed and six taken prisoner. This was typical of the year as a whole, JG 26's total 1942 aircrew casualties reaching only fifty-seven killed in combat: 19 August 1942 was to be far from typical, however, losses—and victories—being disproportionately high. That day the British launched Operation 'Jubilee', the landing at Dieppe, under an umbrella of Spitfires, supported by Bostons, Hurricanes, Whirlwinds, Typhoons and Mustangs. JG 2 and 26 were thrown in in force, together with Dornier Do217E bombers of KG 2 and II/KG 40, Junkers Ju88As of I/KG 77 and Heinkel He111Hs of III/KG 53.

All day the 190 available Fw190s and sixteen Bf109Gs were thrown against the massed formations of RAF fighters: German bombers suffered heavy casualties and were able to inflict little damage on shipping, but the losses inflicted on the British squadrons made it the most costly single day of the war for Fighter Command. Fifty-nine claims were submitted by JG 2 and seven 'probables' by JG 26. In II/JG 2, *Oblt.* Siegfried Schnell claimed five victories to raise his total to seventy, but the hero of the day was III/JG 2's *Ltn.* Josef 'Sepp' Wurmheller. Wurmheller, who had already claimed twenty-two victories during May and June, crash-landed following a combat, and he made several claims. He suffered a broken leg and brain concussion, but when strapped up, and with his leg in plaster, took off again to claim further victories, raising his total for the day to no less than seven! In the same *Gruppe*, *Oblt.* Egon Mayer claimed his fiftieth, JG 26's top scorer being *Feldwebel* Emil Babenz with three. JG 2's losses totalled twelve Fw190s and a Bf109G, while JG 26 lost six pilots, including *Oblt.* Johannes Schmidt (twelve victories), *Staffelkapitän* of 11 *Staffel*. RAF losses on 19 August exceeded 100 aircraft—most of them Spitfires—to all causes, while a number of USAAF Spitfires were also lost.

One of the Luftwaffe's most famous fighter pilots, *Hptm.* Joachim Müncheberg (r) is seen here with personnel of II/JG 26 when he was *Gruppenkommandeur* in early 1942. He was killed in action a year later while leading JG 77 in Tunisia, with his score at 135.



Fw190A in a camouflaged dispersal. Note the yellow panel painted beneath the engine cowling.

New Adversaries

The Dieppe operation marked the end of an era, for the pattern of aerial warfare over western Europe was about to change radically. Even as the Luftwaffe struggled with the RAF over the brief battlefield of Dieppe, B-17 Flying Fortresses of the new US 8th Air Force bombed II/JG 26's airfield at Abbeville-Drucat.

At first the American four-engined bombers (soon known colloquially to the Luftwaffe as *Viermots*), with their massive armament of ten or eleven .50in machine-guns, were viewed with some awe by the Germans, and initial attacks failed to achieve any success. But II/JG 26 showed on 6 September that the formidable Fw190, determinedly flown, could take the measure of the new foe when the unit shot down two 97th Bombardment Group B-17s near Amiens. Next day the bombers approached over the North Sea, this time meeting fighters from II and IV/JG 1. Each *Gruppe* suffered the loss of an Fw190 to the gunners (who claimed twelve and ten probables), but were unable to record a single success.

By September 1942, German fighter strength in the west had reached a peak since 1940. In *Luftflotte* 3, *Stab*, I, II and III/JG 2 and *Stab*, I, II and III/JG 26 had some 278 aircraft to hand, nearly all Fw190s—mainly A-3 and A-4 subtypes. The two *Jabostaffeln* added another 31 Fw190A-4s, while the high-altitude 11 *Staffeln* contributed 33 Bf109Gs. In northern Germany, Holland and Denmark with the *Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte, Stab* and I, II, III and IV/JG 1 had 233 Fw190s and Bf109s in the ratio of about 2:1. *Luftflotte* 5 (*West*) had I/JG 5, which had taken over IV *Gruppe*'s thirty-five Fw190s for the defence of Trondheim, Bodo, Bardufoss, Petsamo and Kirkenes, while the latter was just beginning re-equipment with Bf109s.

The biggest US heavy bomber attack to date was launched by 108 B-17s and B-24s on 9 October, Fives-Lille steelworks being the target; on this occasion JG 26 was able to bring down four for the loss of two Fw190s. Within a month, however, great changes were to take place. During the summer the need for experienced formation leaders on the Eastern Front had resulted in the departure of II/JG 26's *Hptm.* Joachim Müncheberg, to be followed in November by *Hptm.* Hans Hahn from III/JG

Mechanics of JG 26 clowning on the wing of an early production Fw190A.

2, who had claimed sixty-eight victories in the west, four of them against four-engined bombers. His place was taken by 7 *Staffel* commander, *Hptm.* Egon Mayer. A sad loss occurred on 31 October, when one of Adolf Galland's young brothers, Paul (seventeen victories), serving with JG 26, was shot down in the sea off England and killed while escorting a *Jabo* raid on Canterbury. He had just shot down one Spitfire when hit, his victor then being shot down by his own wingman.

During October the war in the Mediterranean started to go seriously wrong, and on 8 November came news of the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa. At once, II/JG 2, 11/JG 2 and 11/JG 26 were despatched to Sicily, preparatory to a move to Tunisia. I/JG 2 moved to Marseille-Marignane, and 10 (*Jabo*)/JG 2 to Istres to meet any attempted invasion of the southern coast of France. These latter units would not return until January 1943, while II/JG 2 was to stay in Africa until April of that year. The two 11 *Staffeln* were not to return, being incorporated into JG 53 and JG 51 respectively. Consequently, a new 11/JG 26 was formed in December 1942.

Even as this train of events began, the US 8th Air Force embarked on an offensive against the German U-boat bases in south-west France. To protect them, Egon Mayer led III/JG 2 to Vannes from Poix. In this new location, 8 *Staffel* had already been on detachment, aiding Junkers Ju88C-6 long-range *Zerstörer* of KG 6 and V/KG 40 in their lonely war against British anti-submarine aircraft over the Bay of Biscay. On 23 November the B-17s attacked the U-boat pens at St. Nazaire, and for the first time came under head-on attack, a tactic introduced to III/JG 2 by Mayer as the best way to inflict telling damage without meeting the full fury of the defenders' fire. The results were good, two bombers immediately being shot down and two more badly damaged, while a third was shot down as the formation left the target. Only one FW190 was lost, while one of the damaged bombers crashed later on return to England.

A small reinforcement was received late in the year when elements of I/JG 27, newly returned after a bad mauling in Africa, began reaching the Western Front, initially to fly with JG 26. Against the growing Allied bomber offensive, there was at this stage little with which the Luftwaffe could deliver a riposte, as indicated by the scale of the largest raid to be launched on England at this time. On 20 January 1943, FW190 *Jabo* from JG 2 and 26, with a substantial fighter escort, attacked targets in south and east London. RAF fighters were quick to intercept, three of the *Jabo* and six escorting fighters being shot down.

Seven days later came the first American raid on the German homeland. The target was Wilhelmshaven, the first of many in northern Germany to be attacked during

Armourers of III/JG 2 prepare belts of 20mm ammunition for the engine-mounted cannon of this Bf109F.

A Bf109F of III/JG 2 is manhandled into its small hangar. Note the *Gruppe*'s cockerel emblem on the nose.

the next few months. The approach of sixty-four B-17s and B-24s brought *Maj. Dr.* Mix's JG 1 into the forefront of the defence at last, and in a sustained head-on attack the unit was able to shoot down three bombers—but at a cost of seven of its own aircraft.

The bombers approached again on 4 February, but on this occasion were intercepted by eight Bf110 night-fighters from the Dutch-based IV/NJG 1, led by *Hptm.* Hans-Joachim Jabs. Jabs had been one of the most successful *Zerstörerflieger* of 1940 with nineteen victories, and had added six night victories since then. He now led his section into the attack, three B-17s being shot down, one by Jabs himself. These were the first of some 210 day victories which the night-fighter force was to claim in the defence of Germany over the next two years. However, the heavily laden Bf110s suffered much damage from return fire on this occasion; one crash-landed on fire, while all the other seven were damaged. In a repeat performance on 26 February, Jabs again led an attack, this time on B-24s raiding Emden. *Hauptmann* Ludwig Becker, *Staffelkapitän* of 12 *Staffel*, and one of the then leading *Nachtjägd Experten* with forty-four victories, took part in this, his first-ever daylight air battle; he failed to return. With RAF Bomber Command raids now approaching a new zenith of strength and concentration, such misuse of the night-fighters could be ill-afforded. However, the day fighters were now beginning to get the measure of the bombers, and on this same date (26 February) Bf109Gs of 2/JG 1 were able to claim five B-17s without loss.

At the start of 1943, the Luftwaffe had some 635 fighters available in the west, including the Reich itself. Late in January, however, III/JG 26 was sent on detachment to the east, but during the following month reinforcements began to arrive. In France a new *Jabo* unit, *Schnellkampfgeschwader* 10, was formed with a full complement of Fw 190A-4/U8s, the *Stab*, I and II *Gruppen* being based in the Brest area for operations over the Bay of Biscay. (A III *Gruppe* had been the *Geschwader*'s first unit, but was based in the Mediterranean area.) At the same time the Bf109G-equipped III/JG 54 arrived at Lille from the east, led by *Maj.* Reinhard Seiler, a *Ritterkreuzträger* whose score was fast approaching 100.

Other changes at this time included the resting of *Maj.* Gerhard Schöpfel, his place as *Kommodore* of JG 26 being taken by Josef Priller. Priller's III *Gruppe* was handed over to *Hptm.* Fritz Geisshardt, who arrived from North Africa with 100 victories to his credit on all fronts. At this same time Adolf Galland's other brother, Wilhelm-Ferdinand, took over II/JG 26 from *Hptm.* Conny Meyer (sixteen victories).

Gruppenkommandeur of III/JG 2 from November 1942; first pilot to reach 100 victories on the Western Front; first great hunter of the *Viermots*; *Kommodore* of JG 2—these were some of the milestones in the combat career of *Hptm.* Egon Mayer, seen here about to enter the cockpit of a Bf109. The aircraft bears a radio mast pennant with the insignia of 7 *Staffel*.

During April 1943, II/JG 2 returned from Tunisia, III/JG 54 then moving from France to take station in the Oldenburg area, while the *Reichsverteidigung* (Home Defence) was further reinforced with the arrival at Rheinsburg of *Hptm.* Klaus Quaet-Faslem's I/JG 3 from southern Russia. This unit also flew the Bf109G, which was becoming increasingly important in the defence's establishment; JG 2 also began re-equipping with it, at least on a partial basis.

New tactics were being tested during this period, and on 22 March *Ltn.* Heinz Knoke of I/JG 1 dropped a 250kg bomb, fused for air bursting, on a formation of B-17s: one was brought down. This tactic was ordered to be developed further forthwith. During the spring and summer of 1943 the Americans concentrated their unescorted attacks on northern Germany; raids on targets in the occupied territories continued, but with the benefit of fighter escort. Thus *Luftflotte* 3's fighters continued to be engaged in regular combats with Allied fighters, while the *Reichsverteidigung* pilots were able to concentrate their whole attentions on the bombers.

Slowly the forces available for the defence continued to grow. During April, JG 1 was split to form a new *Geschwader*, JG 11. I/JG 1 became II/JG 11 under *Hptm.* Dolenga (to be replaced shortly afterwards by one of the real veterans of the Luftwaffe, the one-eyed *Hptm.* Günther Specht). III/JG 1 became I/JG 11, while a new III/JG 11 began forming at Nordhausen under *Hptm.* Anton Hackl (RK, EL), recently returned from JG 77 in the Mediterranean, with over 100 victories. The first *Kommodore* of the new unit was also an ex-JG 77 man, *Maj.* Anton Mader (RK). JG 1 was at once re-formed, Fritz Losigkeit's IV *Gruppe* being redesignated I/JG 1, while a new III/JG 1 was established in Holland; II/JG 1 remained unchanged. At this stage *Dr.* Erich Mix handed over as *Kommodore* to one of the most successful *Jagdflieger* in the Luftwaffe, *Maj.* Hans Philipp (RK, EL, S), who during the previous month had become the second pilot to claim 200 victories, while flying in Russia with JG 54. Initially, JG 11 was strengthened by the despatch of 2/JG 27 from France to operate with it. An independent *Jagdstaffel Helgoland* was also formed at this time for the defence of the German Bight.

Bf109F of III/JG 2 in a hangar in Brittany, spring 1942. As in the photographs on pp. 10 and 11, this machine has had the fuselage sides above the wing roots painted black to hide exhaust staining.

In the summer of 1942, III/JG 2 re-equipped with the Fw190A. Here one of the *Gruppe*'s aircraft receives maintenance in its dispersal hangar.

One of the leading pilots of JG 2 during the mid-war years was *Hptm.* Siegfried Schnell. The rudder of his FW190A is seen at Théville, France, in June 1942, indicating sixty-two victories. Then *Staffelkapitän* of 9 *Staffel*, Schnell claimed five victories in one day over Dieppe two months later.

During April, JG 26 formed a new 12 *Staffel*, but that same month the *Jabostaffeln* of JG 2 and 26 were incorporated into a new IV/SKG 10, and within two months this *Gruppe* and II/SKG 10 had left France to aid in the defence of Sicily. During May a new 10/JG 26 was formed as a fighter unit, raising the *Geschwader* effectively to four *Gruppen* strength. The unit suffered a serious loss on 5 April, however, when Fritz Geisshardt, the new *Kommandeur* of III *Gruppe*, was shot down after his 102nd victory. He succeeded in crash-landing his aircraft, but had received mortal wounds and died next day—the first *Ritterkreuz Experte* to be lost in the west during 1943.

It was not only the US bombers that appeared by day, although they were certainly in the majority. On 17 April 1943 a force of twelve Lancasters led by Squadron Leader J. D. Nettleton, undertook a surprise daylight attack on the MAN works at Augsburg in southern Germany. Flying low across France, they were chased by aircraft of JG 2, which caught them south of Paris and shot down four—one of them becoming the *Geschwader*'s 1000th success of the war. On 3 May, eleven Venturas of No. 487 Sqn., escorted by Spitfires, attempted to attack targets in the Amsterdam area. Some sixty Luftwaffe fighters rose to intercept, FW190s taking on the escort while Bf109Gs made short work of the bombers. One, hit early in the fight, managed to limp back to England and crash-land; the other ten all failed to return.

The 8th Air Force continued its attacks on northern Germany. On 17 April, as JG 2 was in combat with Nettleton's Lancasters, the new 5/JG 11 (ex 2/JG 1) was claiming four more B-17s. Nine days later the heaviest casualties yet were inflicted on the Americans, when 107 bombers attacked Vegesack. Two *Gruppen* of JG 1 rose to defend the target, shooting down fifteen bombers and damaging many others, while another fell to the flak defences. Five German fighters were lost and five more damaged.

The units in the north were now enjoying a high degree of success against the *Viermots*, and when, on 14 May, 5/JG 11 was able to claim five more B-17s, three of them by aerial bombing, this single *Staffel* had raised its score of the

The pilot of 'White 8' of 7/JG 2 moves into action. He is tentatively identified as *Oblt.* Kurt Goltzsch, an *Experte* with forty-three victories, who was shot down by Spitfires in November 1943 and subsequently died of his wounds.

The main adversary of the Luftwaffe fighter force in 1943: a Boeing B-17F Flying Fortress believed to have been shot down by *Hptm.* Egon Mayer of JG 2.

big bombers to fifty. Not all were doing so well, however, for in the Heligoland area next day III/JG 54 suffered damaging losses whilst attacking bombers. Amongst those lost were two of the *Gruppe*'s leading pilots, *Hptm.* Günther Fink (RK), who had been credited with fifty-six in the east, and *Ltn.* Friedrich Rupp (RK), who had added two *Viermots* to the fifty kills he had claimed in Russia. Another Eastern Front veteran was also killed on this day: *Ltn.* Horst Hannig had taken command of 2/JG 2 early in the year after ninety victories with JG 54, and had added eight more in the west before being shot down by Spitfires near Caen. Critically wounded, he tried to bale out, but his parachute failed to open. He received the EL posthumously. It was now clear that not all pilots could adapt quickly to the different conditions of the two fronts. Seiler was posted back to the east to take over I/JG 54, and the highly experienced Western Front *Experte* Siegfried Schnell was posted from II/JG 2 to take over III/JG 54. The following month Walter Oesau was at last rested from the leadership of JG 2; Egon Mayer was promoted to succeed him, handing over III *Gruppe* to *Hptm.* Bruno Stolle.

The many ideas being put forward for the destruction of bomber formations resulted in the establishment of *Erprobungskommando* 25, a three-*Staffeln* formation based at Wittmund. Later forming the nucleus of *Jagdgruppe* 10, one *Staffel* of *Erpkdo* 25 was equipped with Bf110s and Me410s, and the unit's task was the full operational testing of bomber-killing schemes. Another new unit formed at this time was I/JG 300, the first of the *Wilde Sau* single-engined night-fighter *Gruppen* to operate against British bombers. Although such units were a further drain on the supply of single-engined fighters, by June 1943 production had reached 1,000 per month for the first time, and such improved types as the Fw190A-6 and Bf109G-5 and 6 were becoming available. The summer also saw the return of III/JG 26 (flying Bf109Gs) from Russia and operational status given to III/JG 11, which moved to Oldenburg.

Reichsverteidigung

July's series of Anglo-American day and night raids, which devastated Hamburg, galvanized the authorities into giving home defence its proper priority. It was a terrible month for Germany on all fronts, with the Allied invasion of Sicily in the south, and the failure of the *Zitadelle* offensive at Kursk in the east. Plans to vastly improve the defences and step up fighter production were vetoed by

Hitler in favour of a wildly optimistic new bomber offensive against England, but despite this lack of support from the top, much was done to strengthen the defences—though not all of it advantageous to the day fighters.

The success of *Wilde Sau* operations led to the formation of 3 *Jagddivision* with three full *Geschwader*, although not enough aircraft were available at first as qualified instrument-flying pilots flocked to volunteer. II and III/JG 300 were formed as 'guest' units of II and III/JG 1, to operate the latter's aircraft by night. Gradually aircraft arrived for these new units, and in October JG 301 began forming in southern Germany. With the formation of JG 302 in November, complete reorganization took place: I and II/JG 301 became I and II/JG 302, while III/JG 300 became III/JG 302. At the same time, III/JG 301 formed a new III/JG 300, and a completely new JG 301 of three *Gruppen* was then formed.

July also saw the withdrawal of a number of units from the southern front, which were soon able to join the defence. From Italy came II/JG 27 under *Hptm.* Werner Schroer to the Wiesbaden area; at the same time I/JG 27, now reunited, moved to Vienna under a new *Kommandeur, Hptm.* Ludwig Franzisket. *Hauptmann* Karl Rammelt's II/JG 51, which had taken a terrible battering in Sicily, arrived at Neubiberg, München (Munich), while from the south and east all the remaining *Zerstörergruppen* were withdrawn to home defence, to be completely reorganized.

From Italy came *Stab*/ZG 2, III/ZG 1 and III/ZG 26. The latter unit, equipped with Bf110s, had operated with success throughout the Mediterranean for many months and was almost ready to resume operational flying. III/ZG 1 exchanged the remaining Me210s it had brought from Italy for the new Me410s; joined by the *Zerstörerstaffel* from *Erpkdo 25* under *Hptm.* Eduard Tratt, it now became II/ZG 26, with Tratt as *Gruppenkommandeur*. *Stab*/ZG 2 meanwhile became *Stab*/ZG 26, the new *Kommodore* being *Maj.* Karl Boehm-Tettelbach. The *Geschwader* began reorganizing at Wunstorf, Quakenbrück and Hildesheim, III *Gruppe* going into action almost at once. Against unescorted bombers, the heavily armed *Zerstörer* were to prove extremely effective, relieving the night-fighters of some of the pressing need to double in this rôle. Not until October, however, did the *Geschwader* receive its I *Gruppe*, when I/ZG 1 returned from Russia to take up this designation.

During August a second *Zerstörergeschwader* began forming as ZG 76, I *Gruppe* from three Bf110 reconnaissance *Staffeln*, and II *Gruppe* with a nucleus from a *Zerstörerschule* and the night-fighters. A completely new III *Gruppe* was to be formed in November, by which time the other units had already been in action for a month.

II/ZG 1 had also returned from Italy during August 1943, but was sent to Brest to replace the departed units of SKG 10, where V/KG 40, a *Gruppe* of four *Staffeln*, was based at Lorient, operating Ju88C-6 *Zerstörer*, together with a small fighter unit, the *Jagdkommando Brest* (otherwise 1/SAGr 128) with Fw190s. Here *Stab*/ZG 1 and V/KG 40 became a new I/ZG 1 in October, while the *Jagdkommando* was renumbered 10/ZG 1. II/ZG 1's stay

An Fw190A-4, featuring bomb shackles beneath the wings and fuselage, taxies past the dispersal pen of a Dornier Do217 (probably of KG 2 or KG 40) on a snow-swept airfield. It is possible that the aircraft was serving with II/JG 26.

Fw190As of 7/JG 2 prepare to take off. 'White 8' is the aircraft of an *Experte*; a double line of victory bars can be seen on the rudder.

was brief, however, for in November it moved to Wels in Austria, to join the home defence against a new threat from the US 15th Air Force in Italy.

During 1943 the incursions of RAF Mosquitoes deep into the Reich led Göring to order the formation of two special units—*Verstärktenstaffeln*—to catch the fast bombers. Experienced pilots were recalled from the east to lead these units, JG 25 forming at Gardelegen and Berlin-Staaken and JG 50 at Wiesbaden in August. Both units were equipped with Bf109Gs specially modified with every possible performance-boosting device. In the event, neither unit was to reach the strength of a full *Gruppe*, much less a *Geschwader*, and nor did they enjoy any particular success against Mosquitoes.

The final reinforcement of the summer was the remainder of JG 3 from Russia. I *Gruppe*, which had already been joined by the *Stabschwarm*, had been engaged on high-altitude interception since June, and was now joined in this work by II *Gruppe*, which operated over Holland and Belgium, while III/JG 3 went to southern Germany. The *Geschwader* was led by *Obstlt.* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke (RK, EL, S), a pilot with over 150 victories; II *Gruppe* was commanded by *Hptm.* Kurt Brandle (RK, EL; 150+ victories), while *Kommandeur* of III *Gruppe* was *Hptm.* Walter Dahl (50+ victories). During September the *Geschwader* was joined by IV *Gruppe* from Italy. This relatively new formation, which had not previously operated with the rest of the unit, was led by *Hptm.* Franz Beyer (RK; 70+ victories).

The battle over Germany continued. Until July the only longer-ranging escort available to the Americans was the P-38 Lightning, which enjoyed relatively little success over western Europe, and was never available in large numbers. At last, however, auxiliary fuel tanks became available for P-47s, extending their range considerably. The first use of them was made on 28 July 1943, when the targets were Kassel-Batteshausen and Oschersleben, near Magdeburg—still well beyond the range of the fighters. As soon as the P-47s turned back the attack began, Fw190s of JG 1 going in first, followed by Bf109Gs of II/JG 11; 5/JG 11 bombed one formation from 25,000 feet, *Oberfeldwebel* Johannes Fest obtaining a direct hit, which brought down three bombers. The rest then attacked with guns, raising the unit's claims for the day to a record eleven. Altogether fifteen bombers were lost on this raid—a hard blow, for nineteen were not to return from the Kiel and Hamburg area three days later. On 30 July Kassel was again the target for 186 bombers, but once more opposition was severe, and twelve more were shot down. In one week of effective interceptions the defending fighters had shot down, or damaged so badly as to be unusable, about 100 heavy bombers.

Oberleutnant Josef 'Sepp' Wurmheller, victor of seven combats over Dieppe on 19 August 1942, is seen at Beaumont, France, in September 1943, by which time he had become *Staffelkapitän* of 9/JG 2. The rudder of his Fw190A, Wr. Nr. 0314, shows eighty-one of his final total of 102 victories.

Then, on 17 August 1943, the Americans tried something new. During the morning 146 bombers, escorted by swarms of Spitfires and P-47s, crossed the Dutch coast, swept inland and swung south-east into Germany. Attacking first, II/JG 1 shot down seven bombers; followed by elements of JG 2 from the south, the formations passing close to the bases of II/JG 27 and JGr 50. Seven more bombers had gone down by the time the target—the Regensburg-Prüfening Messerschmitt works, close to the night-fighter training base of NJG 101—was reached. The bombers did not then turn for home, but headed south, making for airfields in North Africa, coming within range of the units of 5 *Fliegerdivision* and being attacked by aircraft of II/JG 51 and I/JG 27, which flew from Fels am Wagram in Austria. Three more bombers fell, and by the time they reached Africa another seven had gone down, bringing the total to twenty-four.

The carnage was not over, however. Early in the afternoon 229 more bombers appeared heading in much the same direction, the ball-bearing works at Schweinfurt being their target. This time the Luftwaffe was really ready. Over 300 fighters were put into the air during the raid. JG 1, 3 and 26 attacked first, one *Gruppe* taking on the escort of P-47s until it turned back at the limit of its range. From farther north came JG 11 and III/JG 54, the aircraft of 5/JG 11 this time carrying new Werfer-Granate 21 launchers beneath the wings, from which to lob rockets into the bomber formations. They were soon joined by the aircraft of II/JG 27 and JGr 50, and by the time the target had been reached, twenty-one bombers had gone down. Three more fell as the formation began the return run, and soon Bf109Gs of JG 25 and Bf110s of III/ZG 26 had joined the fray. Finally JG 2 chased them out across the Channel, where Allied fighters were waiting to cover the final leg of their ordeal. A final two bombers fell into the sea to raise losses on this raid to thirty-six, and for the day to sixty, while over 100 more were damaged.

Following such terrible losses, no further USAAF raids beyond escort range were made for some weeks, although the fighter airfields in the west received a savage hammering from escorted formations. Generally, however, the *Jagdwaffe* losses remained bearable at this time. During June the new *Kommandeur* of III/JG 26, Kurt Ruppert (twenty-one victories), had been shot down, while in July *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Leesman, leader of III/JG 1, was lost in combat with bombers, having claimed fifteen of his thirty-seven victories in the west. The Regensburg raid on 17 August had cost JG 26 Wilhelm-Ferdinand Galland,

The increasing number of US heavy bombers appearing over the Reich during 1943 led to the re-formation during the year of several *Zerstörergruppen*. Here groundcrew of the new III/ZG 76 enjoy the winter snow around some of the unit's Messerschmitt Bf110G-2 aircraft. Note the twin Werfer Granate 21 rocket launchers beneath each wing of the aircraft outboard of the auxiliary fuel tanks. The *Geschwader* code '2N' is stencilled in very small characters ahead of the fuselage *Balkankreuz*.

shot down by P-47s in the Liège area after his 55th victory—eight of which had been against *Viermots*. *Oberfeldwebel* Kurt Knappe, an Eastern Front veteran who had just added five victories with JG 2 to his earlier fifty-one, went down early in September, a victim of Spitfires.

The situation was about to change radically for the worse, however. On 27 September II/JG 11 was scrambled to intercept another incoming raid on northern Germany. As the fighters approached the bomber formation, lobbing rockets ahead of them to send down several B-17s, they were suddenly attacked by P-47s. Fitted with larger long-range tanks, four groups of Thunderbolts were making their very first penetration into German airspace, and they claimed twenty-two victories for one loss. All seem to have attacked the unfortunate II/JG 11, which lost at least twenty Bf109s, 6 *Staffel* counting twelve shot down or crash-landed and nine pilots killed. In return the *Gruppe* was able to submit twelve claims for the day, the single P-47 being credited to *Oblt*. Heinz Knoke.

During October the Americans launched another series of raids deep into Germany and beyond fighter escort range, which was to cost the 8th Air Force dear, but also take toll of the defenders, not least among them several notable *Experten*. First to go down while attacking bombers over the North Sea on 4 October was *Oblt*. Erwin Clausen, *Kommandeur* of I/JG 11 (RK, EL); while the majority of Clausen's 132 victories had been claimed in the east, they did include fourteen four-engined bombers. Four days later the bombers returned to hit the Bremen-Vegesack area; thirty failed to return, but part of the cost to the Luftwaffe was JG 1's *Kommodore* Hans Philipp; Walter Oesau was recalled to operational flying to replace him. Next day Anklam, Marienberg, Gotenhafen and Danzig were the targets, but at the cost of twenty-eight bombers; thirty more were lost on the 10th during an attack on Münster, including a complete formation from the 100th Bomb Group, all shot down within seven minutes. The climax came with a return to Schweinfurt on the 14th by 291 B-17s—escorted as far as possible by 300 fighters. The result was near-catastrophic, with sixty bombers shot down, seventeen so badly damaged that they had to be scrapped, and 121 more damaged to a lesser extent. Amongst the defending formations III/JG 3 had done particularly well, claiming eighteen of the bombers for only a single loss.

A trio of Bf110G-2s of 6/ZG 76 over afforested terrain during winter 1943–44. Very heavily armed for their task of bomber destruction, these machines have twin Wfr. Gr. 21 launchers beneath each wing and a ventral pack containing a pair of 20mm MG 151 cannon, in addition to their fixed and flexible gun armament.

Since January 1943 the 8th Air Force had lost 727 four-engined bombers, but in the same period the number serviceable at any one time had risen from about 100 to six times that number. Luftwaffe fighter strength in the west had also risen, to about 975 aircraft—a factor which was baffling the Americans, since their gunners had during the period submitted claims for 3,320 shot down! In fact losses to gunners had been quite low, amounting to perhaps a tenth of that figure. German techniques and tactics had improved immeasurably; individual pilots' scores against the *Viermots* were growing quite high, and in the important 1 *Jagddivision* area II/JG 11 boasted all the current leaders, including *Oblt.* Knoke with fifteen, *Hptm.* Specht with fourteen and *Ltn.* Hugo Frey with twelve.

During the rest of 1943 the bombers restricted their activities to raids within escort range, as more and more P-47s with the larger auxiliary tanks became available, and during the last two and a half months of the year the Luftwaffe fighters found their assaults on the bombers continually interfered with. By the end of December ten

Major **Gerhard Schöpfel,** ***Kommodore*** **of JG 26 until January 1943, climbs out of his personal Fw190A, marked with the initial letter of his name.**

more pilots decorated with the *Ritterkreuz* had been lost, one each by JG 1, 11 and 27, two each from JG 2 and 26, and three from JG 3. While six of these were pilots who had gained the vast majority of their victories in the east, the others were European veterans. Indeed, Kurt Goltzsch of JG 2 and Johannes Seifert of JG 26 had each claimed in excess of forty victories against the Anglo-American air forces. The increasing losses amongst the *Experten* were the surest indicators of the growing tempo of air combat; JG 26 for instance had seen losses rise by some 150 per cent on the previous two years. December was a very ominous month for the *Jagdwaffe*, for it saw the combat debut of the P-51B Mustang—a fighter which possessed the range to accompany the bombers to virtually any target, and the performance equal to or better than any fighters the Luftwaffe then had available.

During October JG 2 and 26 were both brought fully up to an increased establishment of four *Staffeln* in each *Gruppe*. By the end of the year, however, JG 25 and 50 had been disbanded, while in December II/JG 51 returned to Italy. During November II/JG 53 had arrived from that area, taking up station at Vienna to join in the defence of the southern Reich. The winter had reduced the effectiveness of the *Wilde Sau* units to the point of inefficiency, and at this stage 3 *Jagddivision* was disbanded, JG 300, 301 and 302 becoming bad-weather fighter units for use by night and day. They would increasingly be called upon to operate in the normal day-fighter role as 1944 progressed. In Denmark a 10 *Staffel* had been formed for JG 11 at Aalburg during August, while the *Jasta Helgoland* was about to become 11/JG 11 at the start of 1944.

The year 1944 found Germany on the defensive on all fronts. At home the attacks of Bomber Command and the 8th Air Force would increasingly be joined from the south by the 15th Air Force. Initially 15th AF raids were sporadic, and were either unescorted or covered only by small forces of P-38s. An attack on Wiener Neustadt's aircraft factories in Austria had cost eleven four-engined bombers on 2 November, while one on Augsburg some six weeks later resulted in the destruction of four more. On 7 January 1944, twenty escorting P-38s were harshly treated in the Wiener Neustadt area, seven of these being shot down for minimal Luftwaffe losses to bring home to the men from Italy that Reich territory remained a tough area of operations.

***Major* Schöpfel's Fw190A is pushed into its camouflaged dispersal on *Stab*/JG 26's airfield.**

Home on Reich defence duty after a long sojourn in Africa, I/JG 27 was equipped with Bf109G-6s. The surround to the famous *Gruppe* emblem on the nose of the aircraft carries the legend '*Staffel Marseille*', indicating that these are machines of 3 *Staffel*.

Deadly Foe

January was a month of contrast, however. On the 5th, a raid on Kiel brought the first serious combats with P-51s, which claimed twenty aircraft shot down. Most of their victims were Bf110 night-fighters, 8/NJG 2 being virtually wiped out when it lost nine of eleven aircraft sent up, the two survivors both being badly damaged. JG 11 also fell foul of Mustangs after accounting for a number of B-17s and P-38s. The Mustangs were back on 11 January, forty-nine of them accompanying 238 bombers to attack targets in the Brunswick–Halberstadt–Oschersleben area. In bad weather they were not present in sufficient numbers to prevent an efficient interception by 207 Luftwaffe fighters from all three *Jagddivisionen*: 174 bombers raided the Ago factory at Oschersleben, where thirty-four of their number were lost. By the end of the day sixty bombers and five escorting fighters had gone down, albeit at a cost of thirty-nine interceptors.

At the end of the month the P-51s returned in force to hunt down the *Jagdflieger*, claiming some forty on 29

Luftwaffe fighter units in the west, winter 1943–44:

Jagdgeschwader 1; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 2; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 3; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G
Jagdgeschwader 5; I, IV	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgruppe 10	Bf109G
Jagdgeschwader 11; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 26; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 27; I, II	Bf109G
Jagdgeschwader 53; II	Bf109G
Jagdgeschwader 54; III	Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 300; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 301; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
Jagdgeschwader 302; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf109G/Fw190
*Sturmstaffel 1**	Fw190
Einsatzstaffel Erla	Bf109G
*Jagdgruppe z.b.V.***	Bf109G
Zerstörergeschwader 1; *Stab*, I, II; 10 *St*	Bf110/Ju88C-6; Fw190
Zerstörergeschwader 26; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf110/Me410
Zerstörergeschwader 76; *Stab*, I, II, III	Bf110

**Sturmstaffel 1* was a newly formed unit under *Maj.* von Kornatzski, composed basically of pilots in trouble with the authorities, who had been allowed to join the unit on condition that they signed an undertaking to destroy at least one bomber on every interception, even if this meant ramming.

***Jagdgruppe z.b.V.* was a very small formation attached to Headquarters, with which personnel such as *Generalmajor* Galland could fly from time to time.

An engine fire in an Fw190A of a *Luftflotte* 3 unit is dowsed with liberal quantities of foam.

January and forty-five more next day. The RAF could still be a potent foe too, with its growing numbers of improved Spitfire IXs and Typhoons. On the 30th, II/JG 11 was surprised by British fighters while flying at low level over Holland, losing at least eleven Bf109s with another badly damaged. In return the *Staffel* claimed one victory against the opposition—apparently Typhoons of Nos. 198 and 609 Squadrons. By the end of the month the defenders had lost 233 fighters with a further 107 damaged, against claims of 288. Amongst those lost was the first of the increasing number of successful four-engined bomber destroyers to fall—*Ltn.* Willy Kientsch (RK, EL) of II/JG 27, whose score of fifty-two included twenty *Viermots*.

Nonetheless February found the defences still with an available strength of 345 single-engined and 128 twin-engined day fighters. Worried by the recent losses suffered, and by the apparently ever-growing strength of the defences, the Americans now launched the first combined 8th/15th Air Forces offensive—Operation 'Argument'—against the German aircraft industry. Known popularly as 'Big Week', it began on 20 February with an attack by 1,000 bombers escorted by all available 8th AF fighter groups, and five borrowed from the 9th Air Force. Factories in the Braunschweig–Leipzig–Oschersleben areas were the targets for the day, and from this massive force the Luftwaffe was able to shoot down only twenty-one bombers. A formation of Bf110s from the veteran III/ZG 26 was particularly hard hit as it attempted to attack the bombers, two-thirds of the machines involved falling to P-47s of the 56th FG.

Two days later a strong force from Italy headed for the Messerschmitt works at Regensburg. Attacked all the way to and from the target, it suffered the loss of nineteen bombers and two escorting fighters. Next day the 15th AF tried again, this time for the Daimler-Benz aero-engine works at Steyr in Austria—seventeen B-24s failed to return. On the 24th came a joint attack; the 15th returned to Steyr with eighty-seven B-17s, while 477 8th AF bombers attacked Schweinfurt-Gotha. Units of JG 3, JG 27 and ZG 1 intercepted the former raid, shooting down a complete 'box' of ten bombers from the 2nd BG, which suffered an overall loss of fourteen aircraft out of a total of sixteen B-17s and three P-38s which failed to return. The 8th sustained heavy but proportionately less severe losses, forty-four aircraft failing to return. The series of attacks reached its climax on 25 February when formations from the west and south headed for the Regensburg–Prüfening area. The 15th AF attacked first, losing thirty-nine bombers, one P-47 and three P-38s, while out of 267 8th AF B-17s, twelve were lost.

By the end of February the claims of the defenders had risen to a record 529, but at a tremendous cost. Losses of aircraft stood at 355, with 155 more damaged—virtually

continued on p. 33

Page 25 above: Messerschmitt Me410A-2/U4 of 6 *Staffel* ZG 26, Hildesheim, autumn 1944. Shown in the short-lived single-seat fighter-type markings adopted by *Zerstörer* units early in 1944, this aircraft has the horizontal bar marking denoting a II *Gruppe* machine, the clog emblem of II/ZG 26 and white fuselage band worn by most destroyers defending the Reich.
Below: A groundcrewman applying black paint to the wing root of a Bf109F, probably of JG 2, to hide exhaust burns.

Page 26 above: Flight line adjustments to Fw190A fighters of II/JG 26, with 'black 10' second from the front.
Below: Focke-Wulf Fw190D-9, 'white 10' of the second *Gruppe* of an unidentified *Jagdgeschwader* at the end of the war. It bears grey 74/75/76 camouflage, an unusually long II *Gruppe* bar and white numbers, indicating a 4 *Staffel* machine.

Page 27 above: Messerschmitt Bf109G-14 of 14/JG 5, based in Norway in 1945. In grey 74/75/76 camouflage, it has JG 5's *Reichsverteidigung* band and the wavy line marking to denote a IV *Gruppe* machine, as stipulated in orders issued in mid-1944.
Below: Armourers loading a Wfr. Gr. 21 mortar rocket into its launching tube on an Fw190A-7.

Page 28 above: Focke-Wulf Fw190A-8, Wr. Nr. 172689 flown by *Major* Heinz Bär of II/JG 1 from Störmede, April 1944; 'red 13' was Bär's regular aircraft, although his 200th kill (marked on the rudder) was actually scored in another Fw190, 'red 23', this being a B-24, on 25 April 1944.
Centre: *Reichsverteidigung* markings: (A) JG 1 (Fw190A), (B) JG 2 (Fw190D), (C) JG 3 (Bf109G), (D) JG 4 (Fw190A).
Below: Messerschmitt Bf109F-2 of 9 *Staffel* JG 2, Théville, France, May 1942. The machine flown by *Oberleutnant* Siegfried Schnell when his score was nearly 60 (57 victories are shown on the rudder), it has the vertical bar of a III *Gruppe* aircraft and the widely applied black wing root paintwork to hide exhaust burns.

Page 29 above: *Reichsverteidigung* markings: (E) JG 6 (Fw190A), (F) JG 7 (Me262A), (G) JG 11 (Fw190A), (H) JG 26 (Fw190D), (I) JG 27 (Bf109K), (J) JG 51 (Bf109G), (K) JG 52 (Bf109G), (L) JG 53 (Bf109G), (M) JG 54 (Fw190D), (N) JG 77 (Bf109K), (O) JG 300 (Fw190A), (P) JG 301 (Ta152H).
Below: Messerschmitt Bf110G-2 of 4 *Staffel* ZG 26, early 1944. Although heavily armed for the bomber interception rôle, Bf110s suffered crippling losses from Allied escort fighters and *Zerstörer* formations had virtually ceased to exist by the summer of 1944. This machine, in 74/75/76 camouflage, has the individual letter 'K' in the *Staffel* colour and the letter 'M' indicating 4 *Staffel*.

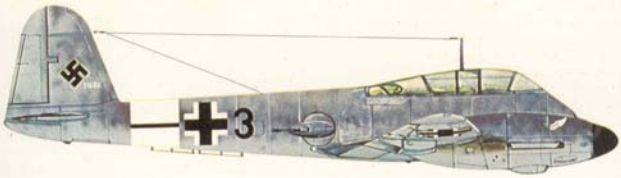
Page 30 above: Messerschmitt Me262A-1, Wr. Nr. 120604, 'red 1' of JG 7, Lechfeld, 1945. Again in 74/75/76 camouflage with 02 mottling on the fuselage, the colour of the number indicates a 2 *Staffel* machine.
Below: An Me262A-1a of JG 7 being readied for flight; the yellow number indicates a 3 *Staffel* aircraft and the yellow band forward of the fuselage cross the original Me262 fighter test unit, which became *Kommando Nowotny* and finally JG 7.

Page 31: In order to protect their ever more vulnerable airfields from marauding Allied fighter bombers, the Germans made extensive use of both fixed and mobile flak units in the last months of the war. Illustrated (above) is a quad *Flakvierling* 38 mounting on an Sd.Kfz 7 chassis and (below) in a typical 'flak pit'.

Page 32: (1) *Leutnant* fighter pilot, 1944–45, as he might appear in casual service dress around his airfield. The 1943 *Einheitsmütze*, here piped silver at the crown for officer's rank, became popular for all ranks in 1944–45. Over service breeches and boots and the popular *Fliegerbluse* he wears a pattern of leather flying jacket which was widely used in the last year of the war, with a velveteen shawl collar, concealed left chest pocket, and terminals for electric heating under small flaps on outer forearms. The Luftwaffe eagle in silver, and epaulettes of rank on yellow flying branch underlay, are the only insignia.

(2) *Oberstleutnant* in flying clothing, 1944–45. This *Geschwaderkommodore*, wearing the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords at his throat, is identified by a rank patch on both upper sleeves of the winter flying suit. He wears the officer's *Schirmmütze* (peaked service cap), a deflated lifejacket with gas bottle at the waist, and seat-type parachute pack and harness. Apart from the rank patch, his outfit is typical of German fighter pilots of all ranks in the last winter of the war.

(3) Flak gunner, 1944–45. The typical winter uniform of a teenage crewman of one of the numerous light flak batteries which protected the flight paths of fighter stations in the last winter of the war. He wears the standard 1943 helmet with Luftwaffe colour scheme and decal; a greatcoat, with rank patches on the collar and shoulder straps both bearing the red *Waffenfarbe* of the *Flakartillerie*; service dress trousers; and the web gaiters and ankle boots typical of German troops late in the war. He carries a magazine for the 20mm Flak 38 cannon.



MESSERSCHMITT Me410A-2/U4 of 6 Staffel ZG 26, Hildesheim, autumn 1944

FOCKE-WULF Fw190D-9 'white 10' of an unidentified unit, Germany, 1945

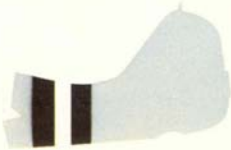
MESSERSCHMITT Bf109G-14 of IV Gruppe JG 5, Stavanger, Norway, 1945

FOCKE-WULF Fw190A-8, Wr Nr 172689 of II Gruppe JG 1, Störmede, April 1944

A

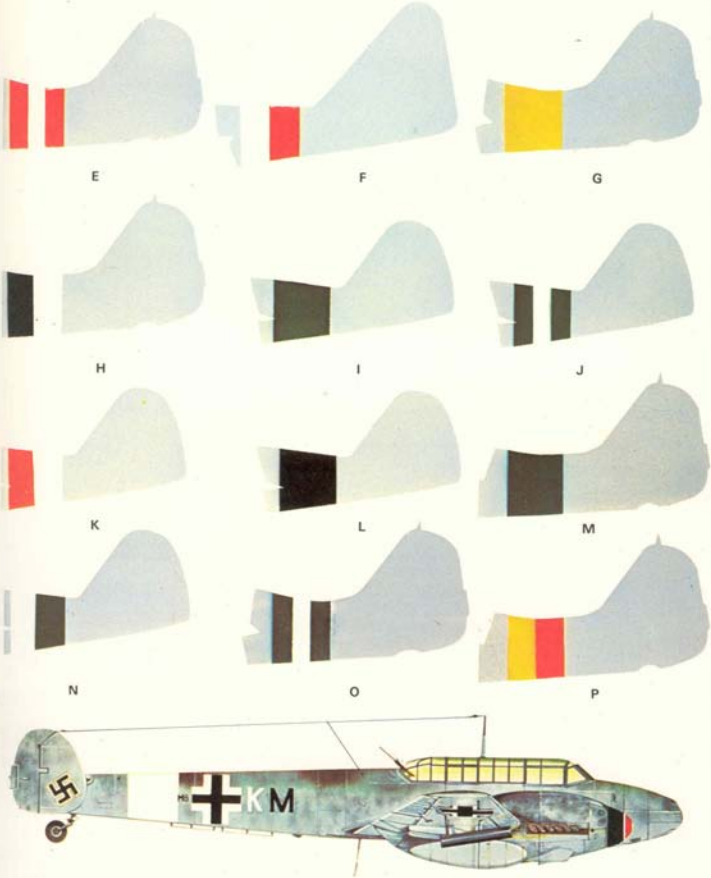
B

C



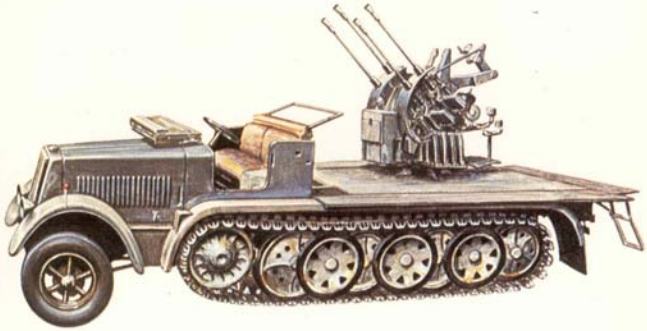
D

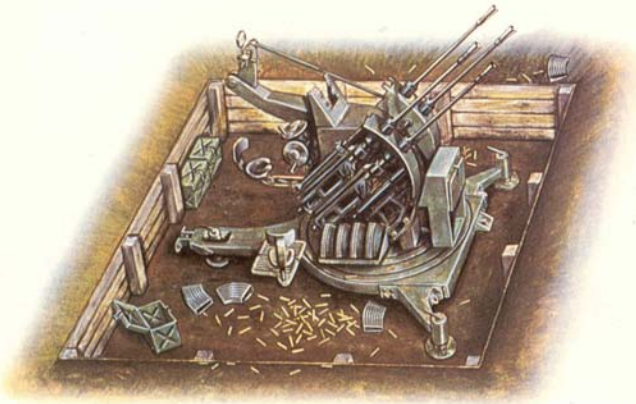
MESSERSCHMITT Bf109F-2 of 9 Staffel JG 2, Théville, France, May 1942



MESSERSCHMITT Bf110G-2 of 4 Staffel ZG 76, November 1944

MESSERSCHMITT Me262A-1, Wr Nr 110604 of Kommando Nowotny/JG 7, Lechfeld, 1945





1

2

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100 per cent of the strength to hand at the start of the month! Losses of pilots were also high, and the demands of other fronts meant that replacements were now arriving without adequate operational or flying training, many having flown only for some 160 hours—about one-third the number put in by their opponents before reaching an operational unit.

The *Zerstörergruppen* had suffered particularly heavily, and by the end of the month III/ZG 76 had to be disbanded, the survivors being amalgamated with I *Gruppe*. Among the losses of more notable fighter *Experten* had been the *Kommandeur* of III *Gruppe*, *Hptm*. Johannes Kiel (RK), who fell on 29 February, having claimed at least twenty-one *Viermots*. Another loss was *Hptm*. Eduard Tratt, the most successful of all Luftwaffe *Zerstörerflieger*, and the only one to receive the EL (posthumously) while on Reich defence. As *Kommandeur* of II/ZG 26, Tratt had claimed twenty-five of his thirty-eight victories in the west. Another serious loss was *Maj*. Franz Beyer (RK), *Kommandeur* of IV/JG 3, who fell victim to RAF Spitfires over Venlo on 11 February; eleven of his eighty-one victories had been claimed in the west.

During this period there had been little change in the disposition of the forces available. In February, I/JG 5 arrived in southern Germany, having served for three months in Rumania and Bulgaria, flying against the 15th AF. At the same time, however, I/JG 2 was despatched to Italy to aid the forces operating over the new Anzio beachhead. On the Brittany coast of France a new III/ZG 1 was formed with Ju88C-6 *Zerstörer*, but for over-water operations rather than anti-bomber work.

The activities of US escort fighters now began to increase as more of the potent P-51s entered service. Equally dangerously, the Americans began more freelance fighter sweeps ahead of the bombers, designed to hunt down German fighters before they could attack. Such tactics were to prove particularly costly to the Luftwaffe. Additional external fuel tankage continued to increase the range of other US types, and on 3 March P-38s appeared over Berlin for the first time. This heralded a series of attacks on the capital, intended primarily to bring the defenders to battle and give the new American fighters a chance to win air superiority. Activity everywhere was increasing. In March the new tactical air forces in England began raiding the transport system of western Europe and the new V-1 launching sites along the coast of the Pas de Calais.

US penetrations to Berlin built up during March and succeeded in bringing up the German fighters, losses of the more experienced pilots rising steeply. *Oberstleutnant* Egon Mayer, *Kommodore* of JG 2, had recently (5 February) become the first pilot to achieve 100 victories entirely on the Channel Front; he was also at this time top scorer against the *Viermots*, with twenty-five to his credit. On 2 March Mayer was advised of the award of the *Schwerte* (Swords), but that same day was shot down and killed by P-47s of the 56th FG with his score at 102. *Major* Kurt 'Kuddel' Ubben (RK, EL) was posted in from JG 77 to replace him.

On 4 March the Mustangs suffered their first setback during an escort to Berlin, when pilots of II/JG 1 were able to 'bounce' the 363rd FG and shoot down eight without loss. Two days later Berlin was again the target for a massive formation of 730 bombers and 796 escorting fighters. About 200 German interceptors got off, to shoot down a record sixty-nine bombers and eleven fighters, but at a crippling cost of eighty aircraft, with many others seriously damaged. *Leutnant* Hugo Frey, *Staffelkapitän* of 7/JG 11, claimed no less than four *Viermots* shot down, raising his score of these to twenty-six out of a total of thirty-two—the first to exceed Mayer's total. Immediately thereafter, however, he was himself shot down and killed; a posthumous award of the RK followed. This same date saw the loss of *Oblt*. Gerhard Loos (RK) of III/JG 54; his total of ninety-two included fourteen in the west.

On the 8th, Berlin was hit by 590 bombers and 801 fighters. Once more substantial losses were inflicted, totalling thirty-seven bombers and seventeen fighters, but German casualties were again severe. More raids followed, including one on Augsburg on 16 March when ZG 76 rose to oppose the bombers, but suffered fearful losses to the P-51s of 354th FG. Of forty-three Bf110Gs involved, twenty-six were shot down and ten more so badly damaged that they had to crash-land.

The 15th AF returned to the attack on the 18th and 19th, raiding Klagenfurt and Graz in Austria—raids which cost twenty-five bombers and four escort fighters, but allowed a large number of defending interceptors to be caught and destroyed on the ground while refuelling. The pressure was clearly telling, for little opposition could be offered to another attack on Berlin on 22 March, most of the twelve bombers brought down falling to flak. Losses for the month were as heavy as those in February—356 aircraft lost and 168 damaged—but claims were substantially down at 355. Of nine *Ritterkreuzträger* killed or seriously wounded, several fell late in the month, after the Berlin offensive had eased. Two were lost on 23 March, one of them the great *Oberst* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke (RK, EL, S), *Kommodore* of JG 3, who fell to Mustangs over Schöppenstedt. His 162 victories included twenty-five in the west in some four years of continuous combat. His place would be taken by *Maj*. Friedrich-Karl 'Tutti' Müller from JG 53. Six days later the *Geschwader* lost its II *Gruppe Kommandeur*, *Hptm*. Detlev Rohwer (RK), who force-landed after combat with P-38s; his leg was amputated in hospital, but he died next day. Earlier in the month, on the 15th, JG 3 had also lost *Hptm*. Emil Bitsch (RK) to RAF fighters; Bitsch, a *Staffelkapitän* in III *Gruppe*, had 108 victories at this time, all but four claimed in Russia. It had been a bad month for the *Geschwader*.

Efforts were now made to move the *Zerstörergruppen* farther east, to escape the attentions of Allied fighters; ZG 26's Me410s were having their armament increased to bring further weight of fire to bear on the bombers, but

A Bf109G being prepared for a sortie under natural cover on the edge of an airfield. The spinner is decorated with the widely used '*Spiralschnauze*' marking designed to put bomber gunners off their aim—a marking that was surprisingly effective.

which reduced their performance and made them more vulnerable than ever. I *Gruppe* had some aircraft fitted with packs, including additional 20mm cannon, while III *Gruppe* received some aircraft modified to carry a 50mm semi-automatic tank cannon.

In an effort to combat the Mustangs, a number of Bf109Gs—fitted with new DB605A engines with water-methanol injection to improve their performance at high altitude—were issued to III/JG 1 and II/JG 11 in northern Germany and Holland, and to I/JG 5 in the south. The Reich was reinforced by II/JG 53 from Austria, soon to be followed by other units. During April the remaining units of JG 27 returned from the Mediterranean and Balkans, this enlarged four-*Gruppe Geschwader* becoming wholly involved in home defence, initially mainly in Austria. At the same time I/JG 2 returned from Italy to France, while the formation of a new *Geschwader* began. I/JG 4 had been in existence for some months, serving in Rumania and Italy. Now *Maj.* Kornatzki's *Sturmstaffel 1* formed the nucleus of a new II *Gruppe*—which was to operate as a *Sturmgruppe* equipped with heavily armoured and up-gunned Fw190A-8s. The *Stab z.b.V.* became *Stab*/JG 4, and a new III *Gruppe* also began formation. Shortly afterwards IV/JG 3 was also designated a *Sturmgruppe* and began similar re-equipment. One typical pilot in this new unit, *Fw.* Emil Boesch, was sent into action in an Fw190 after only one 20-minute familiarization flight in the type.

April 1944 saw the opening of an offensive against German oil resources, begun by the 15th Air Force, which made the first of a series of raids on the oil fields and petroleum plants of Ploesti, Rumania. This target was to claim an increasing part of the 15th's efforts during the next four months, though the attacks were interspersed with raids into Austria and southern Germany. The latter targets remained costly, the defences bringing down twenty bombers and damaging thirty more during an attack on Steyr on 2 April, although escorting fighters were able to claim thirty-two interceptors without loss. It was during this month that the 15th also introduced P-51s to action, with an almost immediate reduction in its bomber losses.

Constant raids brought a record 554 claims for the defenders, but an almost equally high list of losses, with 413 aircraft destroyed and 151 damaged. Five more *Ritterkreuzträger* were killed, including two from JG 3. The most notable was JG 2's new *Kommodore* Kurt Ubben, shot down by P-47s on the 27th. His score stood at 110, though only twenty of them had been claimed against the western Allies.

While losses had been serious, the *Jagdwaffe* was still a potent force with a good nucleus of highly experienced pilots, but it was now under great pressure. Production of fighters was improving despite the bombing attacks on the

aircraft factories. During May, 2,213 fighters were accepted, fifty per cent more than the previous January, but the supply of pilots was to be the limiting factor. Other fronts were now beginning to be bled white of *Experten*, and as they fell in growing numbers, there were to be few ready replacements for them.

There was certainly no let-up during May, for not only were the raids on the oil industry extended but on the 11th the pre-invasion air bombardment of France began, concentrating on communications, airfields and radar stations. On this very day, *Oberst* Walter Oesau (RK, EL, S), *Kommodore* of JG 1, was killed in combat with P-38s over the Eifel Mountains. His 123 victories included seventy-one in the west (ten of them *Viermots*) and eight in Spain. In his memory his *Geschwader* was awarded the honour-title of 'Oesau'.

On 12 May came the first 8th AF attacks on the oil industry, synthetic petrol plants at Merseberg, Zwischau, Leuna, Brüx, Lützkendorf and Böhlen being hit. Defending fighters claimed seventy-two victories, although on this occasion American losses were admitted as only forty-six. But the cost was increasing, sixty-five Luftwaffe machines going down as well. This was to remain the pattern, for while claims were to be similar to those made in April, losses were again substantially increased, this time to 487 lost and 243 damaged. Indeed by the end of the month 1, 2 and 3 *Jagddivisionen* in northern Germany mustered no more than 175 serviceable single-engined fighters and about thirty-five twin-engined, while in southern Germany 7 *Jagddivision* had around seventy single-engined. Luftflotte 3 had to hand about 125 more, while others were in Austria. Galland, however, was striving to build up a good reserve, with a view to launching one really telling blow to shoot down some hundreds of bombers in a single raid.

The critical losses of the *Zerstörergruppen* at the hands of 8th AF fighters had led to their removal to the south-east at the end of April to face the less heavily escorted 15th AF formations. *Stab* and I/ZG 76, now equipped with Me410s, some with 30mm or 50mm cannon, moved to Vienna-Seyring, while II *Gruppe* went to Prague in Czechoslovakia; 7/ZG 26 and the *Jäfu Ostmark* also went to Vienna, to strengthen the resident II/ZG 1, while the personnel of 8 and 9/ZG 26, having passed their aircraft to the other *Gruppen*, went to form *Erprobungskommando* 262, to test the Messerschmitt Me262. The *Zerstörerflieger* were accompanied to Vienna by I/JG 302, which was to provide cover for their aircraft.

The increase in strength of the *Zerstörer* force in the south-east coincided with the appearance of the much-reinforced escort strength of the 15th AF. On 24 May P-38s of the 14th FG were over Wollersdorf airfield, claiming five Me410s, four Bf110s and a Bf109 shot down for only two losses, while five days later newly arrived Mustangs claimed fifteen Bf110s and ten Bf109s in the Wiener Neustadt area. Production of the *Zerstörer* was at a relatively low priority, and such losses could not readily be made good on a regular basis.

During the month the Reich was further reinforced. II/JG 5 arrived from the Polar front, followed by IV/JG 54 from the Leningrad area, while from Austria I, III and IV/JG 27 moved to central Germany. In the south, *Maj.* Walter Dahl was ordered to form a special composite unit, the *Jagdgeschwader z.b.V.*, which was to have under command the *Gruppe* he had just been leading, III/JG 3, together with I/JG 5, II/JG 27, II/JG 53 and III/JG 54. The unit undertook its first anti-bomber sorties on 23 May. The *Wilde Sau* units were also reorganized, II/JG 301, which had been undertaking night operations from Vienna, being posted to Rumania, while III/JG 301, II/JG 302 and III/JG 302 were all disbanded after a period of day operations in defence of the Reich. The personnel

Believed to have been an aircraft of IV/JG 3 during late 1943, this Bf109G-6 carries a launching tube for a Wfr. Gr. 21 rocket mortar under each wing, the surfaces of which retain delivery radio code letters.

The constant threat of Allied strafing attacks on airfields from mid-1944 onwards made concealment of paramount importance. Here Fw190s taxi to camouflaged dispersals amongst a plantation of young trees on the edge of their airfield, following an operation.

from II/JG 302 were despatched to bring III/JG 300 up to strength.

In addition to Oesau, losses during May had once more included several irreplaceable leaders. JG 3 lost the new *Kommodore*, 'Tutti' Müller (RK, EL), in a crash on the 29th; Leopold Münster (RK, EL), top scorer of II/JG 3 in the west, with twenty-five victories, had also lost his life earlier in the month when he rammed a bomber. JG 11 lost two of its leading bomber-destroyers, *Hptm.* Gerhard Sommer (RK) of II *Gruppe* being killed on the 12th, and *Hptm.* Hans-Heinrich König (RK), *Kommandeur* of I *Gruppe*, on the 24th. König had shot down four *Viermots* in a day on 20 April, and this one-eyed ex-*Zerstörer* and *Nachtjagdflieger* had 20 heavy bombers to his credit from a total score of twenty-four when he was brought down by the explosion of his final victim; Sommer had twenty victories, fourteen of them *Viermots*.

Two *Ritterkreuzträger* were also lost by JG 27, the *Kommandeur* of I *Gruppe*, *Hptm.* Ernst Börngen (RK), being seriously injured on 19 May when he rammed a bomber, his score of forty-five including twenty-four 'heavies', several of them brought down in the Mediterranean area. A veteran pilot, *Maj.* Karl-Wolfgang Redlich (RK), with forty-four victories, was recalled from the General Staff to take Börngen's place, but after adding a single *Viermot* to his score, was shot down and killed on the 29th. During the second operation of the new JG *z.b.V.* on 27 May, the aircraft of *Hptm.* Horst Carganico (RK), *Kommandeur* of I/JG 5, was badly damaged, and while nursing it in to land he struck a high-voltage cable, crashed and was killed.

On 6 June 1944 the Anglo-American landings in Normandy found little initial aerial opposition. *Stab* and II/JG 2 were then at Creil with fifteen Bf109Gs; I and III *Gruppen* at Cormeille-en-Versin with 35 Fw190A-7s and 8s; I/JG 26 at Rheims; II *Gruppe* at Mont de Mas, near the Spanish frontier, and III *Gruppe* at Nancy. All these units had withdrawn from the Channel coast due to the recent attacks on airfields in the area, and only *Stab*/JG 26 remained in the locality, at Lille-Nord. *Major* Priller and his wingman made the only sorties during the morning of D-Day. The Luftwaffe had planned for this eventuality, however, and at once reinforcements were despatched from the Reich, from Galland's reserves, and from Italy, most remaining units now being recalled from this latter front. Within a few days 998 fighters had been poured into the cauldron, but against the overwhelming Allied strength they were to encounter, many units were cut to pieces in a matter of days. *Stab*, I, II, and III/JG 1, reinforced by 7/JG 51 and 9/JG 77, moved to the Le Mans area, joined by I, II, 10 and 11/JG 11; III/JG 11, reinforced to four *Staffeln*, was sent at the same time to the Eastern Front. II, III and IV (*Sturm*) JG 3 arrived at airfields around Evreux and Dreux, while *Stab*, I, III and

IV/JG 27 moved to Rheims and III/JG 54—reinforced by 2 *Staffel* from the east—to Chartres.

Against the 5,000 plus fighters of the Allied air forces this reinforcement was little more than a pinprick, and was to be followed by more. The remaining *Gruppen* of the JG *z.b.V.*—I/JG 5 and II/JG 53—followed, while I/JG 301 moved to Cambrai to undertake night *Wilde Sau* sorties. From Bordeaux the Ju88C-6s of III/ZG 1 flew night ground attacks over the beachhead area. From Italy, I/JG 77 moved to the invasion area in the north, while II *Gruppe* went to southern France, and III *Gruppe* with *Geschwaderstab* moved to Rumania. In southern France, JGr 200 had been formed at Aix-en-Provence and Avignon from the *Erganzungstaffeln* of JG 27, 53 and 77, to provide some defence against 15th AF attacks. 9/JG 5 was sent to Germany from Norway, while some of the surviving Me410s and Ju88C-6 *Zerstörer* were sent to the latter area to combine with JG 5's single Bf110 *Staffel* to form a new IV/ZG 26.

From the start there was chaos. Most units had been operating from permanent airfields in Germany for months. Now the sudden move to rough emergency strips in France brought problems both of navigation and operating techniques for the newly trained pilots who made up much of the strength. Losses due to forced-landings and accidents during the move were very high, while once in the area the ever-present hordes of marauding Allied fighters inflicted the most severe losses. Airfields were a prime target for both fighter-bombers and medium bombers, which added a new hazard of major proportions to the life of the *Jagdflieger*. From 6 June to the end of the month, II *Jagdkorps* recorded 10,061 sorties on the invasion front, claiming 414 aircraft shot down, but losing in return 485 single-engined fighters in the air and 137 more destroyed on the ground. The remaining units of I *Jagdkorps* on home defence claimed 156 victories during the month, but lost 166 aircraft, with 75 more damaged. Including the aircraft lost during the move to France, Luftwaffe fighter losses in the west during June have been estimated to be as high as 1,000 aircraft.

Production was proceeding apace, and reinforcements were fed in continually, but the invasion front was becoming a meat grinder for the *Jagdwaffe*, and on average few of the new pilots, lacking in training or flying time, survived more than three sorties. The heavily armoured Fw190A-8s of IV(*Sturm*)/JG 3 suffered particularly heavily, and had to be withdrawn after three weeks. Even the removal of many of the RAF's best fighters—Tempests, Mustangs and Spitfire XIVs—to combat the new threat to England by the V-1 still left the Luftwaffe hopelessly outnumbered by US P-38s, P-47s and P-51s, and RAF Spitfire IXs and Typhoons.

Everywhere the calls became more urgent: as early as 20 June the 8th AF was back over Germany, attacking fuel oil targets with 1,361 bombers, forty-eight of which were claimed for a loss of twenty-eight fighters. Next day 114 B-17s and seventy P-51s, after attacking similar targets, flew

A late-model Bf109G-10 is refuelled and serviced on a concrete apron. The wing of a Messerschmitt Me323 *Gigant* transport can just be seen in the background, immediately behind the fighter.

Hauptmann Moritz leads out the aircraft of IV(*Sturm*)/JG 3 for take-off from Schongau airfield, August 1944.

on to land in Russia—the first shuttle mission from England. A similar flight from Italy by 15th AF units had already been made on 2 June—the Reich defences now had to consider the possibility of attack from yet another direction. Then on 23 June a major Soviet offensive began in the east, sweeping all before it. The walls of the 'fortress without a roof' had begun to cave in!

In the south the battle with the 15th AF continued, where the *Zerstörergruppen* were now fully engaged, having suffered a hard knock on 26 June when P-38s and P-51s of the escort were able to claim sixteen of them shot down. However, one of the biggest successes in this area was achieved over Budapest, Hungary, on 2 July when Me410s from I/ZG 76, Bf110s of ZG 1 and Bf109s of II/JG 27 claimed forty-five victories—thirty-four of them *Viermots*. Eight of the latter fell to ZG 76, which suffered no losses, although seven Bf109s of JG 27 failed to return. The end came for the *Zerstörer* a few days later, however. On 8 July there took place over Vienna what was probably the greatest twin-engined fighter battle of the war when 82nd FG P-38s claimed sixteen Me410s shot down, together with five single-engined aircraft—all without loss. Such attrition could not be borne, and before the month was out the *Gruppen* had begun conversion to single-engined aircraft. I/ZG 76 exchanged its Me410s for Bf109s, becoming I/JG 76, while II/ZG 76 turned its attention to operations against the Russians over Slovakia. (Later in the year this unit would be withdrawn to become II/JG 76.) Meanwhile II/ZG 1 also gave up its Bf110s for Bf109s and became III/JG 76, 7/ZG 26 becoming 16/JG 76, similarly re-equipped. I/JG 302 moved from Vienna to Hungary to aid in the Eastern Front fighting. The withdrawal of the *Zerstörer* was almost universal at this time: from home defence I and II/ZG 26 withdrew to East Prussia to begin conversion to the Fw190, becoming JG 6, while from the

Hauptmann Wilhelm Moritz (forty-four victories), *Gruppenkommandeur* of IV(*Sturm*)/JG 3, aids groundcrew in preparing his heavily armoured Fw190A-8/R6 *Sturmbock*, Wr. Nr. 681382, for a sortie. Note the armour-glass side panels to the cockpit.

Brest area I and III/ZG 1 handed their Ju88C-6s into reserve, personnel going to help staff the new II and III/JG 4.

Meanwhile Dahl's *Stab*/JG *z.b.V.*, with no units to command, had been redesignated *Stab*/JG 300, and with another heterogeneous *Gefechtsverband* comprising I and II/JG 300, and IV(*Sturm*)/JG 3, he led a very successful interception of 8th AF bombers over Oschersleben on 7 July, fifty-eight bombers being claimed, thirty of them by the *Sturmjäger*. The force comprising 756 B-17s and 373 B-24s, was again hitting synthetic oil plants. The casualties included all eleven B-24s of a squadron of the 492nd BG. Cost to the defenders was nine fighters shot down and three crash-landed. IV/JG 3 had shown what the *Sturmjäger* could achieve when it could get to the bombers, and more such *Gruppen* were to be formed. On a later occasion the unit would claim thirty-two bombers in a day, but when fighters were encountered losses were frequently heavy.

Throughout July *Luftflotte* 3 fought on, sorties approaching 13,000 for the month—three-quarters of them by fighters, which on several days made over 500 sorties; 328 claims were made in the air, but losses totalled 472, 293 of them fighters, with 52 more destroyed on the ground. By far the most violent action occurred on 5 July, when 545 sorties resulted in fifty-eight victories and thirty-nine losses. Operations during the month included numerous ground attack and fighter-bomber sorties, during which *Panzerblitz* anti-tank rockets were employed by some units, including III/JG 54, now mounted on Fw190F-9 aircraft.

In August came the American breakthrough in the south of the beachhead, followed by the Falaise battle and the start of a precipitate German withdrawal from France and Belgium. The month also saw a rapid decline in Luftwaffe activity as units began to give way under the strain. JG 1 and JG 2, the latter almost wiped out, withdrew to Germany to rest and re-equip, joined by I/JG 5, JG 4, II/JG 11, which had suffered particularly heavy losses, and II/JG 53. The new II/JG 6 arrived at Rheims on the 20th, but was decimated in a few days; III/JG 76 arrived from Austria with little better results. From the same area I/JG 301 returned to home defence, III/JG 77 taking its place at Vienna after withdrawing from Rumania, where that front also was falling apart. Another unit disbanded at this time was the Bongart *Geschwader*, which had been operating in central France against Maquis partisans, equipped mainly with Italian Reggianne Re2002 fighter-bombers.

On 15 August Allied forces invaded southern France in overwhelming strength, and within a week the recently

***Jagdflieger* cheer exuberantly as a Bf109G-10 taxies in after a momentous combat, the pilot probably having just achieved his 100th victory.**

A Bf109G-10, marked with a small white '6', returns from a successful sortie.

formed JGr 200 had to be withdrawn to southern Germany with virtually no aircraft left, where it was disbanded.

Despite the losses suffered, *Generalmajor* Galland had again built up a reserve of some 800 fighters during August, a month which had seen a record 1,000 new pilots appear from the schools and aircraft production reaching all-time highs. However, the *Jagdwaffe* was now under increasing attack by a disappointed Göring, and by Hitler, who was beginning to doubt the return achieved on the massively increased production of fighters. Even as the retreat was under way Galland was ordered to throw in the reserve (which included II/JG 6 and III/JG 76) under the threat of the fighter arm being disbanded. The results were tragic. Over 200 found nowhere to land, and had to come down in open country. Of the rest, they were able to achieve little, and total losses amongst this new input reached around fifty per cent to all causes. The ground organizations of the units already with *Luftflotte* 3 were falling apart in the general retreat, and all appeared lost. The remaining units with II *Jagdkorps* fought on as best they could, but losses continued to rise.

A fighter pilot has just scored the 4,000th victory for his unit and receives the traditional congratulations and gifts on landing. The unit has not been positively identified, although the aircraft behind is almost certainly the Bf109G-10 in the previous photograph.

Bf109G-10 fighters of I/JG 27 on Reich defence; note the dark turquoise *Reichsverteidigung* bands on these 1 *Staffel* machines and the last two letters of the radio code 'Z+R' under the port wing of the nearest aircraft.

Then in mid-September the fully extended Allied drive came to a halt, and a desperately needed breathing space was given, as three-and-a-half months of fighting had cost the *Jagdwaffe* many more of its irreplaceable leaders. Twenty more *Ritterkreuzträger* were gone, including ten *Gruppenkommandeurn*. Joseph Wurmheller (RK, EK) of III/JG 2 died in a collision on 22 June, all but nine of his 102 victories having been achieved in the west; he had only just replaced *Maj.* Hubert Huppertz (RK, EL), shot down by P-47s over Caen on 8 June. Thunderbolts had also killed one of the great *Viermot*-killers, Anton-Rudolf Piffer of I/JG 1, who had twenty heavy bombers to his credit, on 17 June.

In the new units, the *Kommandeur* of III/JG 76, *Hptm.* Egon Albrecht, had been shot down by Mustangs on 25 August, while *Ltn.* Rudi Dassow, one of the leading *Zerstörerflieger*, with twelve *Viermots* in his twenty-two victories, was killed on the same day in an Fw190 of the new JG 6. In the heavy combats, some of the veteran *Experten* had done well, but even amongst these men, attrition was high. III/JG 54 had been the most successful unit on the invasion front in terms of aerial victories, but *Oblt.* Eugen-Ludwig Zweigart, initially in the lead with fifteen western victories in his total of sixty-nine, was killed early on, on 8 June. *Hauptmann* Emil 'Bully' Lang (RK, EL) had only recently arrived from Russia, where he had claimed 148 victories. On 26 June he was posted to command II/JG 26, and had claimed twenty-five victories in the west when shot down and killed over St. Trond by P-47s on 3 September. *Leutnant* August Mors of I/JG 5, a fifty-six victory *Experte* in the east, shot down eleven fighters and a bomber in a few days in France, but was killed on 6 August. Not all were dead, however; *Hptm.* Theodor Weissenberger (RK, EL), *Kommandeur* of I/JG 5 and an Eastern Front *Experte* with 175 victories, had claimed twenty-five victories in six weeks, while *Hptm.* Robert Weiss, *Kommandeur* of III/JG 54 had also done very well. July had seen the award of the *Schwerte* to *Maj.* Josef Priller, *Kommodore* of JG 26, for his 100th victory, and to *Hptm.* Anton Hackl (about to become *Kommodore* of the new JG 76) for his 150th. The following month a similar award went to JG 2's new *Kommodore*, *Maj.* Kurt Bühligen, for 104.

With the end of the retreat, units began preparing for action anew, and home defence once more became of prime importance. Over the front, II *Jagdkorps* was reinforced by 5 *Jagddivision*, concentrating initially on providing cover for the civilian workers desperately struggling to complete a West Wall along the northern sector of the frontier. The month of September was to see record deliveries of new aircraft—3,013 single-engined fighters (new or repaired) from a total production of 4,103 aircraft. Losses were heavy on 12 September, however; over 400 fighters stood ready, but were not sent off due to bad weather. Göring overrode his staff, and ordered them into the air, with consequential heavy losses in accidents. During the month, however, 307 victories were claimed by 1 *Jagddivision* on home defence, for a loss of 371, while over 100 more were claimed by the units of II *Jagdkorps* and 5 *Jagddivision* over the front.

After a few weeks' action over France, IV/JG 54 had returned to the east during July, but now it returned to the

west for home defence. III/JG 11 also returned from this front, while I/JG 302 returned from Rumania to become III/JG 301. I/JG 76 joined 1 *Jagddivision*, being renumbered IV/JG 300, while III *Gruppe* moved to Freiburg. All four *Gruppen* of JG 27 were now in the Reich, as were *Stab*, II and III/JG 53, and I and II/JG 77. JG 3 was withdrawn from II *Jagdkorps* for rest and re-equipment.

In mid-September 1944 came the Allied airborne landings at Arnhem and Nijmegen, II *Jagdkorps* gathering a force of nearly 200 fighters to attack—a large part of the weight of this series of actions being carried by JG 11. A big success was achieved on 21 September, when twenty Dakota transports were claimed shot down, together with a couple of escorting fighters, for the loss of thirteen aircraft. This raised total claims for the period 17–21 September to seventy-three aircraft and twenty-four gliders destroyed. On the 25th came an order from Göring that all fighters in the west were to be used as *Jabo*, exclusively for ground support. An attempt to interfere with transports over Arnhem again on the 26th failed due to the strong escort, eleven aircraft being lost for a single claim.

Over Germany, meanwhile, the defences were once again active. On 27 and 28 September, sixty-four *Viermots* were claimed by fighters and flak, JG 4 shooting down twenty-seven of thirty-seven 445th BG B-24s on the 27th alone. Another hard blow was struck against the 8th AF on 6 October, when a *Gefechtsverband* formed from JG 4 and 300 hacked eleven B-17s out of a formation of 385th BG machines. During a raid on Berlin next day, forty-one bombers were brought down, causing the Americans to increase the percentage of escort fighters accompanying each raid.

This resurrection of the *Jagdwaffe* came as no small surprise to the Allies, who had thought the Luftwaffe finished at the start of September. This was far from the case: between September and mid-November the number of day fighters on establishment rose from 1,900 to 3,300. *Staffeln* had their own establishments of aircraft increased by fifty per cent and several *Geschwadern* had fourth *Gruppen* added. New models began to appear, including Bf109Ks and the splendid Fw190D-9—the *Langnasen-Dora*. The first unit to introduce it to combat would be III/JG 54 in October, although a test batch had already seen service with JGr 200 in southern France during the summer. A further renumbering of units during that month accompanied the rebuilding of the force. I/JG 5 became III/JG 6, II/JG 5 became IV/JG 4, and III/JG 76 became IV/JG 53. The whole of JG 77 was at last reunited, and moved to Berlin for the defence of the capital.

More radical events were also taking place: during March 1944, I/JG 400 had been formed to operate the Me163, which was nearly ready for action. By September a *Stab* and two *Gruppen* had come into existence, although far below designed strength, and operations had actually begun during August. While effective as a point-defence interceptor, the Me163 was pressed into service far too early and many fatal accidents resulted for only a few victories. As early as 16 August 1944 two Me163s were shot down by 8th AF P-51s, but the psychological impact of these little aircraft on bomber crews and reconnaissance pilots alike outweighed their actual effectiveness.

A much more viable proposition was the Me262 jet fighter. It had appeared in small numbers as a bomber in the summer of 1944, but only in September was a small test batch at last available for other purposes. Initially tested by *Erpkdo* 262 at Lechfeld (staffed by personnel of 8 and 9/ZG 26, it will be recalled), this unit was disbanded and an operational test *Kommando* was set up under the great *Experte Maj.* Walter Nowotny (RK, EL, S, Br; 255 victories). Although supposed to have a strength of forty aircraft, Nowotny's two *Staffeln* never approached this, but nonetheless achieved some promising results operating from Achmer and Hesepe from early September. Losses were quite heavy, however, culminating on 8 November, when Nowotny himself was shot down and killed by P-51s. Another *Experte, Oblt.* Franz Schall, who was flying with him, claimed three of the attacking fighters shot down before his own aircraft was hit and he was forced to bale

An Fw190A-8/R8 *Sturmbock* of II(*Sturm*)/JG 300 lands at Loebnitz in late 1944. The II *Gruppe* marking is superimposed over the dark blue *Reichsverteidigung* band on the rear fuselage. (Ernst Schroeder via A. Price)

Groundcrew go out to meet the landed Fw190A-8/R8 of II(*Sturm*)/JG 300 on Loebnitz airfield. (Ernst Schroeder via A. Price)

out. At this the *Kommando* was stood down, and *Maj.* Johannes Steinhoff was ordered to form a new JG 7 to operate the Me262. Initially established were the *Stab* and III *Gruppe* at Berlin, while I *Gruppe* started to form at Neumunster from a nucleus drawn from III/JG 3.

At this time a new operational training unit was formed—*Ergänzungjagdgeschwader* 2 (EJG 2)—from a number of *Erprobungsstaffeln* and *Sonderkommando*, mainly to train jet pilots. I *Gruppe* had Fw190s and Bf109s, II *Gruppe* had Bf109s, and III *Gruppe*—formed from the original *Erpkdo* 262—had Me262s under *Maj.* Heinz Bär, posted in from JG 1, where he had become *Kommodore*. This unit was also referred to as the *E.Gruppe Bär*. IV *Gruppe* was formed with Me163s from the old *Erpkdo* 163, but this became I *Gruppe* on the disbandment of the original unit of this title shortly afterwards. III *Gruppe* itself was to become increasingly involved in operational flying.

Thus at the start of November some 28 *Gruppen* were operational in western and central Germany with sixteen more resting or training. The former were: JG 2 (three *Gruppen*), JG 3 (four *Gruppen*), JG 4 (four *Gruppen*), JGr 10, JG 26 (three *Gruppen*), JG 27 (four *Gruppen*), JG 53 (three *Gruppen*), IV/JG 54, JG 300 (four *Gruppen*) and I/JG 400. The latter category included: JG 1 (three *Gruppen*), JG 6 (three *Gruppen*), JG 11 (three *Gruppen*), III/JG 54, JG 77 (three *Gruppen*) and JG 301 (three *Gruppen*).

These units were faced not only with the 8th and 15th Air Forces and the Allied tactical air forces, but RAF Bomber Command, now making increasingly frequent shallow-penetration daylight raids under escort. On 2 November 1944, 300 of the 695 fighters available were sent up to intercept 1,000 bombers and 450 escorts attacking Merseberg. Again the *Sturmgruppen*—IV/JG 3 and II/JG 4—got to the bombers, claiming thirty of them; JG 4 alone accounted for twenty-one B-17s of the 91st and 457th Bomb Groups. However, total claims—including flak—were only fifty, actual losses being forty-eight. On the other hand the Luftwaffe lost some 120 aircraft and ninety-eight pilots, the *Sturmgruppen* alone losing thirty—not good arithmetic for a greatly outnumbered defence.

Worse was to come. On 21 November, claims for five B-17s and two P-51s cost over sixty interceptors, while five days later losses exceeded ninety for thirty-five claims (actual US losses were only twenty). On the 27th, more than fifty losses brought only eleven P-51s shot down. By the end of the month 404 aircraft had been lost against claims for only 155.

Despite the losses, Galland had again been building up his reserves for the 'great blow', hoping to put up 2,000 fighters to shoot down 400 or 500 bombers in a single day. No objections were raised this time, but the authorities had something different in mind. Just as Galland had a record 3,000 fighters ready, all units apart from JG 300 and 301 were ordered to the west for the pending Ardennes offensive. This force included several units with the new Fw190D-9—I and III/JG 2, *Stab*, I and II/JG 26, III/JG 54, and an *Einsatzstaffel* from the training unit JG 104.

The offensive began in bad weather on 16 December 1944 and achieved complete surprise. Initial progress was good but Allied resistance quickly stiffened, and before December was out the operation had come to a halt and been abandoned. The first half of December had cost 136 *Jagdflieger* on home-defence operations; now the first four days of the offensive resulted in the loss of eighty-three more killed and others wounded. On the 23rd the weather

Major Anton 'Toni' Hackl was *Kommandeur of* II/JG 26 on 1 January 1945, leading the unit in Operation '*Bodenplatte*' before becoming *Kommodore* of JG 300 in February. He had flown throughout the war, beginning in Norway early in 1940, and eighty-seven of his 192 confirmed victories were gained in the west. Curiously his last twenty-four claims never achieved official confirmation before the war ended (despite camera-gun film evidence) and were not included in his total.

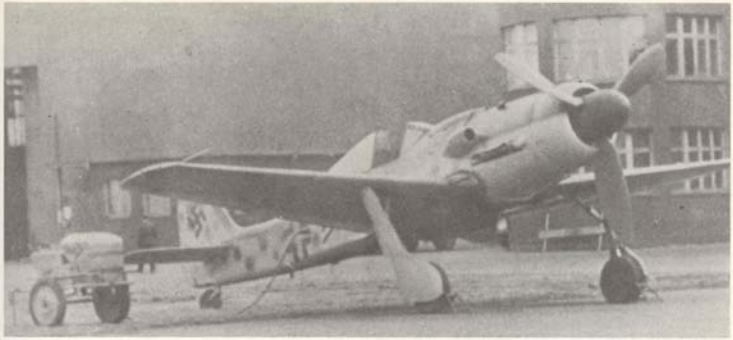
began to clear, and by next day it was perfect, allowing the Allied air forces to operate in strength: Ninety-eight *Jagdflieger* casualties were recorded and 106 on Christmas Eve. Totals of aircraft lost for this period are not available on a daily basis, but may be taken to be somewhat above the personnel casualty figures. In three days, JG 26 lost a dozen of its new Fw190Ds, while in three actions on the 29th, III/JG 54 was all but wiped out, with nearly thirty of its aircraft shot down. One of these was that flown by the *Kommandeur, Hptm.* Robert Weiss (RK, EL), who died with a total of 121, an estimated thirty-one of them in the west. This final nine days of 1944 cost the Luftwaffe 316 fighter pilots killed or missing, bringing the total for the month to 500, with thirty-five more prisoners and 194 wounded. This total included a dozen *Ritterkreuzträger*, two-thirds of them dead, including two *Gruppenkommandeurn* and the *Kommodore* of JG 77, *Maj.* Johannes Wiese (RK, EL), who was badly wounded on the 24th.

As if these losses alone were not insupportable, more were to come. At dawn on 1 January 1945 the infamous Operation '*Bodenplatte*' was launched to smash Allied tactical airpower on the ground. It achieved only mixed success. In the north, 3 *Jagddivision* attacked 2nd Tactical Air Force airfields with JG 1, 3, 6, 26, 27 and 77, plus the two *Gruppen* of JG 54. In the centre, JG 2, 4 and 11 attacked, while to the south in 5 *Jagddivision*'s area, JG 53 took part against 9th AF bases. These units were joined by the *Staffel* of JG 104, *Jabo* Fw190s of SG 4 and *Nachtschlachtgruppe* 20, and by Me262s of KG 51. Many Allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground, but such losses would be made good in less than a month. Luftwaffe losses were higher, and included many pilots who could not be replaced. Over the target area some Allied fighters were up, while Bofors guns were also active. On return the German flak opened up and many more aircraft were shot down. Losses of fighters are estimated to have exceeded 300, while 214 pilots did not return. Before the day was out JG 300 and 301 had lost twenty-seven more aircraft on home defence, whilst making sixteen claims.

So tremendous were the reserves of aircraft available that by 10 January *Luftflotten* 3 and *Reich* once more had between them 1,403 Fw190s and Bf109s in 38 *Gruppen*, together with forty-six Me163s with I/JG 400. It was in aircrew that difficulties in maintaining strength lay: '*Bodenplatte*' had cost amongst others *Maj.* Günther Specht, *Kommodore* of JG 11, *Hptm.* Horst-Günther von Fassong, leader of that *Geschwader*'s III *Gruppe*, together with *Oblt.* Heinrich Hackler, *Staffelkapitän* of 11/JG 77.

The next major operation was on 14 January when 139 casualties were suffered, sixty-nine of them by JG 300 and 301 on home defence and the rest in the west; twenty-eight of the aircraft lost were Fw190D-9s, ten of them from II/JG 301, which had newly re-equipped with them. Official faith in the fighter force—what little of it that had remained—had now been totally dissipated. Galland was on the point of being removed from his command, and Hitler now ordered that a large part of the *Jagdwaffe* be sent to the east, where it might be more able to influence events. JG 1, 3, 4, 6, 11 and 77, and I and II/JG 301 were amongst those to go before the end of the month.

In protest against the pending dismissal of Galland, and the general unfair abuse heaped on the *Jagdflieger*, coupled with the overwhelming influence of the bomber arm despite its virtual eclipse, a number of leading pilots now sought to have Göring removed, and ended up confronting him with a list of demands on 22 January 1945. This 'Mutiny of the Aces' was led by *Oberst* Günther Lützow, backed by Steinhoff, Trautloft, Neumann, Rödel and a number of others. All were sent away under threat of court martial; Lützow was banished to Italy and Galland was removed. His place as *General der Jagdflieger* was taken by *Oberst* Gordon Gollob, while Walther Dahl took Trautloft's place as *Inspekteur der Tagjäger*. Anton Hackl took over Dahl's JG 300. Galland was allowed to begin forming a jet



During the last months of the war, *Oblt.* Oskar 'Ossi' Romm commanded IV/JG 3, a unit in which he had served since the summer of 1944. His personal Fw190D-9 is seen parked at readiness by the control building at Prenzlau in March 1945. Romm claimed ninety-two victories, ten of them in the west. (Oskar Romm via A. Price)

fighter *Staffel—Jagdverband* 44—which he at once set up at Brandenburg from the fourth *Staffel* of IV/JG 54. The rest of this *Gruppe* then formed the nucleus of II/JG 7, which in the event was never to see any action. Subsequently II/JG 76 (the old II/ZG 76 on the Eastern Front, and now virtually a paper formation only) became the basis of a new IV/JG 54, but in the east.

Other units were still being formed or converted, however. KG 54, equipped with bomber Me262s, now converted its I *Gruppe* to a fighter unit as I/KG(J) 54. A new *Erg* JG 1 was formed, with I *Einsatzgruppe* (J) under *Oberst* Victor Bauer (RK, EL; 106 victories). II, III and IV *Gruppen* were later formed, the first two *Gruppen* being based in north-west Germany and Denmark, the other two in the south. Thus began the final phase—the jet battles.

I/KG(J) 54 went into action in the new rôle on 9 February, but at once lost three Me262s, while JG 300 and 301 (back from the east) lost eleven fighters. Five days later these two latter units suffered twenty more losses against claims for two bombers. Over Rheine, the base of KG 51 (Me262s), two defending Fw190Ds of III/JG 54 and one of the jets were brought down by Spitfires. On 25 February, sixteen Me262s of II/KG(J) 54—the second *Gruppe* to begin the change-over—were caught by P-51s of the 55th FG while on a training flight, and six were shot down, including that flown by the *Kommodore, Obstlt.* von Riedesel, who was killed.

However, III/JG 7 had become operational during February and achieved much better results, claiming forty-five *Viermots* and fifteen fighters during the last week of the month. This *Gruppe*, plus the *Stab* and part of I *Gruppe*, were to continue to achieve a good level of success. At this stage, however, II *Jagdkorps* in the west was disbanded, being replaced by 14 and 15 *Fliegerdivisionen*, while 5 *Jagddivision* in the south became 16 *Fliegerdivision*. I *Jagdkorps* was incorporated into IX(J) *Fliegerkorps*, which was busy converting bomber pilots to fly fighters.

This change-over made little difference to operations, however. On 2 March, IX *Fliegerkorps* lost forty-three fighters for fifteen victories, including twenty Bf109s of the newly formed IV/JG 301 on its first and last operation. *Luftflotte* 3 had now gone, replaced by *Luftwaffenkommando West*, but by early March this included only 16 *Fliegerdivision* as its fighter strength—*Stab*, II, III and IV/JG 53 with Bf109s. Under *Luftflotte Reich* were 14 *Fliegerdivision—Stab*, I, II and III/JG 26 with Fw190Ds, *Stab*, I, II and III/JG 27 with Bf109Ks; 15 *Fliegerdivision—Stab*, I, II and III/JG 2 with Fw190Ds; IX(J) *Fliegerkorps—Stab*, II and III/JG 4 with Fw190As and Bf109Gs, *Stab*, I and III/JG 7 with Me262s, I/KG(J) 54 with Me262s, JGr 10 with Fw190s, II/JG 400 with Me163s, and *Stab*, I and II/JG 301. This unit was mainly equipped with Fw190Ds, but the *Stabskette* had the first of the new Ta 152s. JGr 10 was to be disbanded during the month, while I/JG 400 had already disbanded due to shortage of rocket fuel, its pilots going to fly Me262s. Fuel shortage was a very great problem by now, and sorties were very strictly limited as a result, as was training. Also during March the new III and IV/*Erg* JG 1 were disbanded, while Galland's JV 44 moved south to München-Riem to commence operations, drawing to it many of the surviving *Experten*, including the disgraced Lützow and Steinhoff.

Meanwhile several bomber units had been converting to

Interesting close-up of the headgear and oxygen mask of an Fw190 pilot.

fighters, beginning during October–November 1944 with KG 6 and 27. I and II/KG(J) 27 were equipped with Bf109s, and III *Gruppe* with Fw190s, and the first sorties were flown during March against US bombers over Austria. KG(J) 6 also received both Bf109s and Fw190s, while during March the *Stab* and III *Gruppe* began receiving some Me262s. KG 55 also became a KG(J) late in the war, but none of these units were to see much action, due mainly to the ever-greater shortage of high-octane fuel for piston-engined aircraft. The Me262-equipped KG 51 followed KG 54 in converting to fighter operations also.

In the air, 18 March 1945 indicated the way things were going. 1,200 US bombers attacked Berlin, Me262s of III/JG 7 shooting down eight B-17s and five P-51s for two losses. Five Fw190s were lost without success, while flak shot down sixteen more bombers—a better result than that achieved by the fighters.

On 28 March the conventional fighters again lost over forty aircraft, while the final week of the month was to see some 200 more pilots killed. On the 31st, Me262s shot down five Lancasters out of 130 sent over Hamburg, while on 4 April, forty-nine JG 7 aircraft brought down ten *Viermots* over Nordhausen, five more being claimed as probables. On the next day, nineteen bombers out of 1,000 were shot down for the loss of forty-two fighters; two of the claims were recorded by JV 44.

Desperate situations bring forth desperate remedies, and at this stage a fanatical ex-bomber pilot, *Oberst* Otto Köhnke (RK) asked for volunteers prepared to ram bombers in an attempt to strike a new 'great blow'. Aircraft were taken from the units of IX(J) *Fliegerkorps*, and on 7 April the *Rammkommando Elbe* took off 183-strong to undertake Operation '*Wehrwolf*'. Cover was given by Me262s of JG 7 and KG(J) 54, but the result was a disastrous fiasco: 133 aircraft were lost and seventy-seven pilots killed. Indeed only fifteen landed back at their original airfields. The jets fought off the American escort fighters as best they could, making twenty-eight claims, but the results were puny—only eight bombers were brought down.

Three days later the Americans launched a massive bombing attack on the fighter airfields in northern Germany and around Berlin, driving the jets to the Prague area. Only ten bombers of the 1,200 employed were lost. Then began a series of fighter strafes which destroyed hundreds of German aircraft on the ground during mid-April. It was the end. What few aircraft could get into the air were at once hunted down. Only in the south could JV 44—with a growing complement of Me262s handed over by other units—continue to operate with some effect to the very end. By this time it had gained some fifty-six victories, but at the cost of several leading pilots—both in action and in accidents. Lützow and Schall were both killed, while Steinhoff and Karl Schnörrer were both badly injured—four of the sixteen *Ritterkreuzträger* killed or crippled during the last three months of the war.

Several pilots had done quite well on the jet—notably Heinz Bär with sixteen victories, Schall with about fourteen, Weissenberger, who had taken over JG 7 in January, with eight; twenty-seven pilots are estimated to have achieved at least five victories while flying the Me262, seven of them with more than ten. Georg-Peter Eder, Rudolf Rademacher, Franz Schall, Erich Rudorffer, Hermann Buchner and Karl Schnörrer all did well, but their exact claims while flying jets remain uncertain. Galland himself made eight claims, Steinhoff six and Wolfgang Späte—previously the *Kommodore* of JG 400—claimed five. Me262 units are estimated to have been credited with about 613 victories, 427 of these by *Stab* and III/JG 7.

The Western Front had always been the toughest for the Luftwaffe, where those men who had achieved 100 victories could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and had generally been flying since 1940, such as Mayer, Priller and Galland. Most others who reached this magic score against the western Allies achieved some of their victories in the somewhat easier Mediterranean area—Bär, Bühligen, Müncheberg, Schroer, etc. Notable amongst those in the west were the hunters of the four-engined bombers, outstanding men like Herbert Rollwage with forty-four, Walther Dahl and Georg-Peter Eder with

thirty-six each, Anton Hackl and Viktor Bauer with thirty-two each.

The last weeks of the war saw one final reorganization and many disbandments. I and II/JG 1 formed a new I/EJG 1 and re-equipped with the new Heinkel He162 *Volksjäger* jet, which was never to see action. II *Gruppe* was re-formed from part of III/KG 30. During March, however, I/JG 3, I/JG 6, I/JG 11, III/JG 26, IV/JG 27 and III/JG 77 were all disbanded, while in April I/JG 4, IV/JG 26 (which III/JG 54 had become earlier in the year) and II/JG 77 all went. Several of the units sent to the east in January had returned to southern and north-western Germany during April, either due to fuel shortage or because their airfields had been overrun.

* * *

In Norway meanwhile the remaining units of JG 5 had continued to fight their own private war against the British. During 1944 several carrier-borne strikes had been made on the battleship *Tirpitz* in Altenfjord, combats with types such as Grumman Wildcats and Hellcats being fought on these occasions. Three precision raids by Lancasters were also made on the warship, the third on 12 November 1944, causing it to capsize. Due to administrative error the bombers were not intercepted, and this led to the court martial and removal of the *Kommodore, Maj.* Heinrich Ehrler (RK, EL; 205 victories—later killed flying Me262s with JG 7); apparently Ehrler had been visiting a girl-friend at the time, and could not be contacted.

III *Gruppe* continued to operate in the north from Bardufoss, while IV *Gruppe* covered the south from the Stavanger area. At the turn of the year the recently formed

Fw190D-9 with the later type of bulged cockpit hood, which was taken over by US forces immediately after the end of hostilities. Small-size US stars have been applied over the overpainted wing and fuselage national insignia and 'USA 14' is painted across the black and white *Reichsverteidigung* bands of JG 26. (Via R. Halvorsen)

IV/ZG 26 became a new II/JG 5, and converted to Bf109Gs. During 1945 JG 5's regular opponents—Beaufighters and Mosquitoes of the Coastal Command strike wings, began receiving escort from RAF Mustang squadrons, making JG 5's life somewhat harder. The three *Gruppen* remained in action against these opponents until the last days of the war.

Notes sur les planches en couleur

Page 25 en haut: Messerschmitt Me410A-2/U4 de la 6 *Staffel* ZG 26, Hildesheim, automne 1944. Dépeint ici, portant les marques typiques de l'avion d'attaque monoplace (avion qui fut utilisé pendant très peu de temps) adoptées par les unités *Zerstörer* début 1944, cet avion porte la marque d'une barre horizontale indiquant qu'il s'agit d'un appareil de la II *Gruppe*, l'emblème du sabot représentant le II/ZG 26 et la rayure blanche sur le fuselage qui était portée par la plupart des torpilleurs défendant le Reich.

Page 26 en bas: Focke-Wulf Fw190D-9, 'blanc 10' de la seconde *Gruppe* d'un *Jagdgeschwader* non identifié, à la fin de la guerre. Il porte un camouflage gris 74/75/76, une barre de la II *Gruppe* d'une longueur inhabituelle, ainsi que des chiffres blancs indiquant qu'il s'agit d'un appareil de la 1 *Staffel*.

Page 27 en haut: Messerschmitt Bf109G-14 du 14/JG 5 basé en Norvège en 1945. Dans un camouflage gris 74/75/76, il porte la rayure de la *Reichsverteidigung* attribuée au JG 5, ainsi que la ligne ondulée indiquant qu'il s'agit d'un appareil de la IV *Gruppe*, selon les ordres donnés dans le courant de l'année 1944.

Page 28 en haut: Focke-Wulf Fw190A-8, Wr.Nr. 172689 piloté par le Major Heinz Bär du II/JG 1 d'Atoermede avril 1944. 'Rouge 13' était l'avion habituel de Bär quoique sa 200ème touche (marquée sur le gouvernail) eût été faite dans un autre Fw190, 'rouge 23'.
Page 28 centre: Marques de la *Reichsverteidigung*.

Page 28 en bas: Messerschmitt Bf109F-2 de la 9 *Staffel* JG 2, Théville, France, mai 1942. Ceci est l'appareil piloté par l'Oberleutnant Siegfried Schnell à l'époque où le nombre de ses touches approchait 60 (57 victoires sont marquées sur le gouvernail); l'avion porte la barre verticale d'un appareil de la III *Gruppe*, ainsi que de la peinture noire largement appliquée sur la racine de l'aile afin de cacher les brûlures d'échappement.

Page 29 en haut: Marques de la *Reichsverteidigung*.

Page 29 en bas: Messerschmitt Bf110G-2 de la 4 *Staffel* ZG 26, début 1944. Pesamment armés pour leur rôle de bombardier d'interception, les Bf110 subirent de grosses pertes et les formations *Zerstörer* avaient pratiquement cessé d'exister à partir de l'été 1944. Cet appareil, portant le camouflage 74/75/76, a la lettre initiale 'K' peinte dans la couleur distinctive de la *Staffel* et la lettre 'M' indiquant qu'il s'agit de la 4 *Staffel*.

Page 30 en haut: Messerschmitt Me262A-1, Wr.Nr. 120604, 'rouge 1' du JG 7, Lechfeld, 1945. Cet appareil également porte le camouflage 74/75/76, ainsi qu'une tiqueture 02 sur le fuselage, la couleur du chiffre indique qu'il s'agit d'un appareil de la 2 *Staffel*.

Page 31: Pour protéger leurs aérodromes contre les maraudes des chasseurs-bombardiers alliés, les Allemands se servaient beaucoup pendant les derniers mois de la guerre d'unités de défense antiaérienne, tant fixes que mobiles. L'illustration ci-dessus montre un affût quadruple Flakvierling 38 monté sur un châssis Sd.Kfz 7 et celle d'en-dessous le montre dans une alvéole typique de défense antiaérienne.

Page 32 (1) Leutnant pilote de chasseur, des années 1944 à 1945, en tenue de ville. Le port de l'*Einheitsmütze*, dont la calotte de cet exemplaire est gansée d'argent indiquant le grade d'officier, devint courant pour tous les rangs de 1944 à 1945. Par dessus la culotte et les bottes militaires. ainsi que la *Fliegerblause* très populaire, le pilote porte un blouson d'aviateur en cuir à col châle en velours, ayant une poche cachée sur le côté gauche de la poitrine et des bornes pour le chauffage électrique sous de petites pattes sur la face externe de l'avant-bras.
(2) Oberstleutnant en tenue de vol, 1944–45. Ce Geschwaderkommodore, portant la Croix du Chevalier avec Feuilles de Chêne et Epées, est identifié par un insigne de grade sur la partie supérieure de chaque manche de la combinaison de vol portée en hiver. Il porte la *Schirmmütze* de l'officier un gilet de sauvetage dégonflé avec une bouteille à gaz attachée à la taille, ainsi qu'un parachute à siège et un harnais. A l'exception de l'insigne de grade, son uniforme est la tenue-type des pilotes de chasseur allemands de tous les grades pendant le dernier hiver de la guerre.
(3) Canonnier de défense antiaérienne, 1944–45. L'uniforme typique d'hiver d'un membre d'équipage adolescent appartenant à une des nombreuses batteries de défense antiaérienne légère qui protégaient les lignes de vol des bases de chasseurs pendant le dernier hiver de la guerre. Il porte le casque normal porté en 1943, peint dans les couleurs et revêtu de l'insigne de la Luftwaffe; un pardessus portant des insignes de grade sur le col, et des épaulettes, chacune portant la *Waffenfarbe* rouge de la *Flakartillerie*; un pantalon de tenue militaire, ainsi que les guêtres en toile et les chaussures montantes.

Farbtafeln

Seite 25 oben: Messerschmitt Me410A-2/U4 aus 6 Staffel ZG 26, Hildesheim, Herbst 1944. Gezeigt in der kurzlebigen Jagdeinsitzer ähnlichen Markierung, von Zerstörereinheiten früh in 1944 angenommen. Dieses Flugzeug hat die waagerechte Querbalkenmarkierung, die eine II Gruppe Maschine kennzeichnet; das Holzschuh-Abzeichen von II/ZG 26 und weisses Rumpfband von den meisten Zerstörern, die das Reich verteidigten, geflogen.

Seite 26 unten: Focke-Wulf Fw190D-9, 'weisse 10' der zweiten Gruppe, von einem unidentifizierbaren Jagdgeschwader zu Ende des Krieges. Es führt graue 74/75/76 Tarnung, einen ungewöhnlich langen II Gruppe Querbalken und weisse Nummern, auf eine 1 Staffel Maschine hinweisend.

Seite 27 oben: Messerschmitt Bf109G-14 aus 14/JG 5, 1945 in Norwegen stationiert. In grauer 74/75/76 Tarnung es trägt JG 5 Reichsverteidigungsband- und Wellenli- nienmarkierung, laut Befehl 1944 eine IV Gruppe Maschine kennzeichnend.

Seite 28 oben: Focke-Wulf Fw190A-8, Wr. Nr. 172689 von Major Heinz Bär vom II/JG 1 aus Ateormede, April 1944 geflogen. 'Rote 13' war Bärs reguläres Flugzeug, obwohl sein 200. Abschluss (am Seitensteuer markiert) in Wirklichkeit in einer anderen Fw190 gewonnen wurde, nämlich 'rote 23'.
Seite 28 mitte: Reichsverteidigungsmarkierungen.
Seite 28 unten: Messerschmitt Bf109F-2 aus 9 Staffel JG 2, Théville, Frankreich, Mai 1942. Die von Oberleutnant Siegfried Schnell geflogene Maschine als seine Abschusszahl fast 60 betrug (57 Abschüsse sind am Leitwerk angezeigt), sie hat den senkrechten Balken eines III Gruppe Flugzeuges und den weiterbreiteten schwarzen Anstrich an der Tragflächenwurzel, um Verbrennungen am Auspuff zu vertuschen.

Seite 29 oben: Reichsverteidigungsmarkierungen.
Seite 29 unten: Messerschmitt Bf110G-2 aus 4 Staffel ZG 26, früh 1944. Schwerbewaffnet für die Angriffe gegen Bomberformationen; Bf110s ertrugen krüppelnde Verluste und Zerstörerformationen hatten quasi im Sommer 1944 aufgehört zu existieren. Die Maschine in 74/75/76 Tarnung hat den individuellen Buchstaben 'K' in den Staffelfarben und den Buchstaben 'M', um 4 Staffel zu kennzeichnen.

Seite 30 oben: Messerschmitt Me262A-1, Wr. Nr. 120604, 'rote 1' vom JG 7, Lechfeld, 1945. Nocheinmal in 74/75/76 Tarnung mit 02 Melierung am Rumpf, die Farbe der Zahl zeigt eine 2 Staffelmaschine an.

Seite 31: Um ihre Flugfelder vor den plündernden alliierten Jagdbombern zu schützen, machten die Deutschen ausgedehnten Gebrauch von stationierten wie auch mobilen Flakeinheiten d.h. in den letzten Monaten des Krieges. Illustriert (oben) ist ein Flakvierling 38-Aufbau auf Sd.Kfz 7 Karosserie und (unten) ein typischer Flakunterstand.

Seite 32 (1) Leutnant Jagdflieger, 1944–45, in lässiger Dienstbekleidung. Die 1943 Einheitsmütze, hier mit Silberpaspel für Offiziers rang, wurde für alle Range in 1944–45 populär. Über Stiefelhosen und Stiefeln und der beliebten Fliegerbluse trägt er eine lederne Fliegerjacke mit Manschesten-Umschlagkragen, verdeckte linke Brusttasche und Klemmschrauben für elektrische Heizung unter kleinen Patten am äusseren Forderarm.
(2) Oberstleutnant im Flieger anzug, 1944–45. Dieser Geschwaderkommodore trägt das 'Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern'. Er ist identifizierbar durch die Rangabzeichen auf beiden Ärmeln seines Winterfliegeranzuges. Er trägt die Offiziers-Schirmmütze und Rettungsweste mit Gasflasche in der Taille und Fallschirmpaket und -gurt auf der Sitzfläche. Abgesehen von dem Rangabzeichen ist seine Ausstaffierung typisch für alle deutschen Jagdflieger im letzten Winter des Krieges.
(3) Flak-Schütze, 1944–45. Die typische Winter-uniform eines jugendlichen Besatzungsmitgliedes der zahlreichen leichten Flak-Batterien, welche die Flugwege der Jagdflieger-Stationen im letzten Winter des Krieges beschützten. Er trägt den genormten 1943 Helm in Luftwaffenfarben mit Abziehbild; einen Wintermantel mit Dienstgradabzeichen am Kragen und Schulterstücken, beides in der roten Waffenfarbe der Flakartillerie. Dienstanzughosen, Gamaschen und Knöchelschuhe waren typisch für deutsche Truppen zum Kriegsende.

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Avec annotations en français sur les planches en couleur
Mit Aufzeichnungen auf deutsch über die Farbtafeln

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